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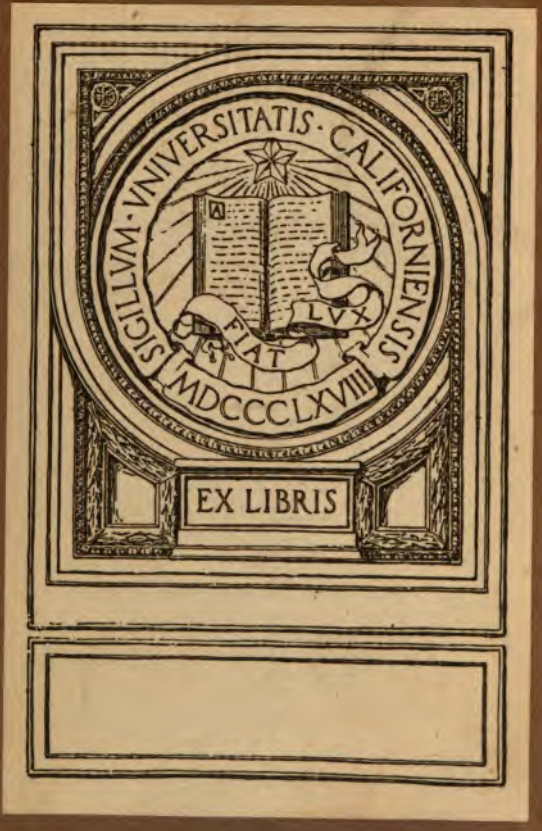
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NATURALISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

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NATURALISM
IN
ENGLISH POETRY.

BY

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1920
LONDON AND TORONTO
J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

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FOREWORD

In the winter term of the year 1902 the Rev. Stopford Brooke delivered at University College, London, a series of lectures on the rise of Naturalism in English Poetry, which met with high appreciation from large and distinguished audiences. They are here printed from the careful MS. which Mr. Brooke always prepared for his public addresses, with the slight verbal alterations necessitated by the change from the form of the lecture to that of the essay. These lectures are represented by the first seven chapters of the present volume. The remaining essays are also printed from the MSS. of lectures, not connected with the above-mentioned course but harmonising with it and completing it so fitly that the volume in which they are included may be said to present a coherent study of a particular epoch of English poetry—an epoch to which Mr. Brooke brought a special sympathy and a special knowledge, and which had a deep and still unexhausted influence on English literature and English sentiment.

Two of these essays, "Shelley's Interpretation of Christianity" and "Byron's *Cain*," have been printed since Mr. Brooke's death in the *Hibbert Journal*, and thanks are due to Dr. L. P. Jacks for permitting their inclusion here. The rest are now published for the first time.

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NATURALISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

CHAPTER I

DRYDEN AND POPE

THE distance in time between the last poems of Pope and the first of Wordsworth was nearly sixty years. During that time, and including the "Lyrical Ballads," the spirit, method, manner, metre, melody and the passion of poetry had suffered a complete and vital change. And the end the poets proposed to themselves in making poetry, and their conception of its origin and sources, were radically different from what they had been in the days of Dryden and Pope. Indeed, the change began before Pope's death, about the middle of his career. Even then, the reaction which brought us to Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge took its rise. It was a reaction which, caused by a weariness of artificial and conventional poetry, went back, in order to draw new life into poetry, to simple human nature, and to Nature herself as seen in her wild and uncultivated beauty. And this, briefly put (it will be sufficiently expanded hereafter), is what is meant by the rise of Naturalism.

If we date it from the middle of Pope's career and not from his death, it took not sixty but fully eighty

years to open out fully a new world of poetry—so slowly do the great changes of literature take place. They seem sudden, as if the flower rose in a single night. They are really the result of many causes operating silently for many years; and they may well be compared to the processes of Nature.

As after 1730—to take a loose date—year by year went by, one new element after another was thrust into the decaying body of the old poetry; and while one after another they hastened its decay, they also established, in and over the decay, a fresh body of life. These new elements were, for the most part, different from one another; nor had they for a long time much connexion each with each. They floated, as it were, in solution, separate one from the other. Nor could they unite to form the new substance of a new poetry, till all the elements of the old poetry had either been transmuted or had decayed and died. All through the poems of this transition-period, the spirit, and manner, and way of thinking concerning man and Nature, which belonged to the poetry of Dryden and Pope, mingled with the new elements, prevented their amalgamation and weakened their young life and progress. The power of Pope's conventions is to be found in Gray and Collins, less in Thomson, in Johnson and Goldsmith, plainly and clearly in the minor poets. It lasted on in the "Satires" of Cowper; it is to be felt in the earliest poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Even in the English poems of Burns its apparition rises like a mournful ghost.

In these greater men the new elements predominated over the old, at least so far as this—"that these greater poets clearly prophesied in their subjects, thoughts

and feeling, and certainly in their manner, the new life which was coming." The red and withered leaves of the past still hung, like those of the wintry oak, upon their branches, but the branches were already growing green with the buds of spring. To read Collins' "Ode to Evening" is almost to read a poem of Wordsworth. It even suggests the note of Keats. And its manner and metre are as new and bold.

But in the inferior men, like the Wartons and others, the artificial elements of the previous school so prevailed, as a clinging spirit, that the poetry of these men had no vitality, and it died. Before 1780, there was a complete exhaustion of the transition-poetry, as great an exhaustion as there was after the deaths of Byron, Shelley and Keats. Then, out of the silence, in which fancy pictures the waiting of the world for a new birth, Cowper and Burns arose, in whose work Nature was born again in poetry. What remained of the old elements, as in Cowper's satirical poetry, was too small a quantity to injure the immense preponderance of the living, active elements. But the full deliverance had not yet come. Certain conventions still hindered the assimilation of all the new elements into one living, active child, with no trace of the old; man in his movement, no savour of the artificial in his voice, no halting in his melody, and with all the future in his eyes.

In the "Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth and Coleridge delivered the young God of a New Poetry from his swaddling clothes; Nature was his mother, suckled him into strength and followed him with maternal love and inspiration for thirty years, till, having overstrained his manhood, he breathed his last in Keats.

This is the story of a hundred years; the pregnancy, carrying, birth and manhood of Naturalism in English poetry. Its strong and beautiful manhood, worn with its passion for revolution, for fullness of life, died with Shelley, Keats, and Byron. There was then a period after their deaths of silence or inefficiency. But, it had left a child behind it; one of its own blood, of its own methods, of its own imagination. For ten years or so this boy grew in silence, hidden under the movements of the English world and, as they developed, it developed; till, when they broke forth, all armed, into the light, another young God of Song broke forth with them; and the second child of Naturalism, deeply related to the spirit of the first, but different in its development and creations, first inspired Bailey, Tennyson and Browning, and a host of minor poets; then, working through changed circumstances and a profound change of thought, filled Clough, Arnold, Swinburne, Rossetti, and died in Morris. It has also left another child behind it, whose multitudinous efforts to express itself we hear hour by hour and day by day. What the child will be, with what voice it will speak, what passion and thought it will have, when it has grown to full youth, when it has assimilated and co-ordinated its disjected elements into one self-conscious being, we cannot tell. But one thing is plain. It will be still a child of Naturalism. It will be still romantic, even if its predominant thought and passion be (as I think it will be), socialistic, in the widest and most ideal sense of the term.

With this broad outline of a century's poetry, I come to the particulars of the change. What reasons can be given for it; reasons contained, not in mere

theory, but in the course of things and in the constitution of human nature; that is, in the circumstances prevailing at the time, and in the way men felt in those circumstances.

1. The first of these reasons is that the poetry which preceded the change had lost its force, that rough, natural, primæval strength, which, untrained, is savage in utterance, but which, trained and tamed, is an element without which the finest poetry cannot be. Dryden possessed it, used it, and his verse, both in manner and matter, rings with it. Mighty are the sinews, bold and loud the tramp of the horse he rides. This rude, natural power which more or less pervades his poetry was a remnant of the Elizabethan genius, of the genius of an age which saw and felt the world as a young man who had retained something of the naïveté of a child would feel it. It was but a remnant, for Dryden had artificialised his poetry by too much reverence for technic, and denaturalised it by subordinating passion to intellectual wit. But the remnant of natural impulse was in it still, and the force which comes from it. And even in the "Satires" and in political poems like the "Hind and the Panther" natural passion, sometimes in coarse forms, breaks out with astonishing eagerness, and adds to the intellectual exercise another and a more enduring power than that of intellect.

Pope followed him with the same intellectual kind of poetry. But he fined and refined everything—verse, manner, thought and style. And in doing so he lost or nearly lost Dryden's force. The bold, masculine, granitic elements disappeared. The "natural man" which had descended to Dryden from the Elizabethans

was made by Pope into the "artificial man." Even in the coarseness which is to be found in both these poets, the difference is seen. Dryden's coarseness was primæval, of a savage actuality. Pope's coarseness was invented and feeble—a coarseness artificially wrought out in the study at his desk, not drawn from any bold experience.

This is the same in higher matters. In satire Dryden's weapon was the sabre. It struck with all the weight of that arm. But its edge was ground to so keen a sharpness that it cleft its enemy like an apple. Behind the sharpness there was weight and power.

Pope's weapon was the rapier. It was as deadly as the sabre but it lacked weight and it wore out more quickly than the sabre, so that, when his own use of it was done, no one could use it after him. It had thinned away into a piece of wire.

Even in the speech of satire, these men are different, and the difference consists in Pope's loss of force. Dryden's work is done in large outline; it has relation not only to the men he is satirising but to the whole of human nature; its voice is bold and loud, as of a northern warrior. Pope's satire is thin, it confines itself to persons, it has no relation to the greater world beyond his clique, and its voice, both sharp and querulous, rises sometimes to a shriek of feeble acuity.

Again, Dryden's didactic poetry was of the poet himself; and concerned with matters in which he was involved and took an active interest. The force of personality was behind it. Pope's didactic poetry adopted a feeble philosophy, not his own; and it was put into verse more exquisite than fitted the philosophy, or than it deserved. There was but little personal

force behind it, little personal conviction. To feel its power in his life, to write for love of it, was beyond him. That would have been natural. But all he cared for was to give it the most exquisite, concise, witty, finished expression he could. In that he succeeded, but it was a highly artificial, not a natural or passionate expression. At last, when Pope's best work was done, the impression left on the world was that force of passion and of thought had left the school. Men began to say: "Where shall we find Power once more, that which not only describes human life, but which also impels it forward into hope and action?" No answer came as yet, but they blindly stretched forth their hands to the deep sources of Power in the natural, not artificial, feelings of man to man; and in Nature herself, not in her artificial gardens, but in her wild originality. And there, after a time, they found Power again in poetry.

2. Then again, the poetry of Pope was a poetry of society in the city; of smart society, as in the "Rape of the Lock"; of the characters of literary and public men and women in a cultured society, even in a clique; a poetry of praise and satire, but chiefly of satire; a poetry of caste and party, and finally a philosophic poetry with morality attached to it, such morality as governs the social world at play with thought, but shrinking from experience. They discussed mankind, but they knew nothing of mankind beyond their caste and their culture. What had such a poetry, with such subjects, to do, or to match itself, with the splendid and infinite range of the highest of the arts, with the great subjects, full of the destinies of history and of the human heart, of which the Greek and Roman and

Hebrew poets had treated? What had it to do with the art by which Shakespeare had unlocked the treasures of human nature, and Milton the deep things of God and man, and all the lyrists of England the infinite varieties of love? What had it to do with the unknown regions of the spirit, hungering for eternal satisfaction, for joy and life and beauty and the vaster love? What had it to do with the vast, undetermined questions of faith and morality, which were silently seething in the multitude of men and women, all over Europe, men and women who knew nothing of literature and philosophy but who were seeking their way out of crime and misery and starvation and the horror of life; whose philosophy was contained in this: "What shall we eat to-morrow?"; whose morality ended in this: "When shall we slay our tyrants?"; whose faith was this: "God will destroy kings, church and noblesse"? Untouched, unfelt, as it were unknown, were all these elements in the poetry of Pope. It was impossible that a poetry, which did not include these subjects—the romantic subjects of human life and of the soul—the crying of man for redemption from wrong, should satisfy mankind in England. There must have been thousands in his time who were thirsting for these subjects to be felt, voiced, and represented in poetry, perhaps unconsciously but passionately thirsting for realities. In this thirst was one of the roots of the romantic, revolutionary and natural poetry which in two generations rose like a god into the glory of his youth. But the thirst was silent; I have said it was perhaps unconscious of its cause. For poetry was in the hands of a few who kept it within the limits of their narrow interests; it was

poetry in a park surrounded by high walls. The people were ignored, not admitted; mankind even beyond the City of London was scarcely recognised. And all the impulses which surge upwards from the people, and break in awakening waves upon the poet's heart, were utterly unknown to the school of Pope. It was no wonder that they lost power, no wonder they decayed.

The poetry of smart society is naturally ephemeral. It is born and dies with the special society. When it arises again, it arises in a different society and has a different form, and dies, in its turn, without leaving any children. It has not the continuity of Nature. It is, however, often charming. When done by a genius like Pope, it is exquisite. "The Rape of the Lock" will always satisfy and please us, when we choose to breathe its atmosphere, by its unsurpassed workmanship, by its fantastic machinery, where the Sylphs are as artificial as the society, by the concinnity of its diction, by its French picturesqueness, and by its porcelain fineness of detail. It is flimsy, but it is the glorification of flimsiness. The only fault to be found with it is—that it is overworked, that even its exquisite technic is too plainly technical, that, in fact, it is even more artificial than the society it treats of; that Pope, when he wrote, was much more in love with his own skill than with his subject. We may say that it is human; it describes a foolish thing, but a thing which exists—but how little and futile a piece of humanity! A pretty rag of human life is all it touches, a tasselled bit of the silken fringe of that vast web into which are woven the stern and solemn wonders of the tragedy and comedy of mankind. Imagination, the giant power, has nothing

to do with it, nor Thought, nor Passion. And mankind desired more than that from the greatest of the arts. It was inevitable that a deeper, more serious, more natural poetry should be demanded, and the demand created the supply.

Pope himself felt that call and answered it in his "Satires," his "Characters," his "Essay on Man," his "Epistles" and "Moral Essays." But this philosophical poetry was like that of the smart society, only of its time, and of no depth; powerless, through want of nature, to exalt or comfort the universal heart of man. Poetry has its own philosophy as it does not explain or versify the metaphysics of the schools that change from age to age. It seeks to find and, if possible, to express, the eternal, the infinite, the primæval and universal elements in human nature, the ideas underneath all philosophies, the passions whose forms are as numberless and as varied as the leaves of all the forests of all the universe. It goes down, to answer every question, to the "Mothers" where they sit in their central Cavern and give birth to all the worlds.[1] When we think of that, we cannot take Pope's philosophical poetry seriously and we know that the world of England would incessantly cry for more than it could bring: "Take us back to the springs of Human Nature."

As to the satirical poetry, it also was of the transient society of the day. It touched with one hand the upper class, the politicians, the celebrated men in fashion and literature, the faddists, the collectors, nor did it omit the women. It touched with another hand the

[1] "The Mothers"—a mysterious originative Power so named in the second part of Goethe's Faust.

poor and wretched scribblers in politics or poetry. It praised well, and it scarified and flayed alive the feeble, slanderous and filthy crew who attempted to live by calumny and perished by their own stupidity. But satire is always transient. Its very nature is to die of exhaustion. Its own venom poisons it. It does no good to the world of man, and folk in the end get tired of that which brings no good to them. It attacks evil by revealing evil instead of blasting it by revealing good. It dwells on evil and gives it vogue for a time by accustoming people to its sight. In the eyes of humanity to call the good good is profitable, but to call the bad bad is no good at all. And poetry, one of whose offices is to reveal what is infinite and perfect, falls below its work when it is employed on the transiency of satire, when it descends to picture the imperfect, the imperfect which is bad. Whenever we come across satirical poetry as the main form of the poetry of any age, the poetry of that age is decaying. And man, reverting to man's natural love of good, of the ideal, of all the sweet and tender things in human nature, began to cry out for a new school, for one in which the subjects should be noble, living, which should dwell not on the diseased, but on the healthy substance of humanity. That school was rising slowly beneath the superficial poetry of Pope and his congeners. The world was pregnant with Naturalism, with the poetry of honest human nature.

Again, this poetry was not only superficial, it was limited. It said its "proper study was mankind." But it was mankind as seen only in the small society of a city—mankind in London only—and in literary London only. It made no wide study of mankind,

none of universal human nature. The vast range of humanity beyond London was left without sympathy —as if it did not exist. This was not only insular, it was insolent, not only insolent, but unintelligent. Want of a large intelligence is one of the marks of all isolated schools of culture—though it is the last thing they think they want. Common human nature, the moment it reaches a certain level of intelligence and begins to feel through that intelligence, feels the interests of mankind; and leaves its isolated village where all the interests are in one street, or its isolated clique in the great city where all its interests are in its own small society, and voyages into and over the great world of humanity in all its developments in divers nations, climates, kindreds and tongues. It feels the pulse (to use a banal phrase) of mankind, not that of a little literary section, only great in its own opinion. Then poetry ceases to be the slave of a closely intermarried aristocracy of culture—it marries into every class, it becomes democratic and international. Its artificial and conventional representation of a few select types of man, intellectually wrought out, passes into a natural representation of human nature seen everywhere, and is passionately wrought out with sympathy and love. Cosmopolitanism was, in reaction from this confined and limited society, born into men's minds and it soon inflamed their hearts. That also was part of the rise of Naturalism. We must dwell on that hereafter, but it is well to say here, at once, that one of the leading ideas of the new poetry, even in its childish days, was this of cosmopolitanism —interest, growing more and more passionate, in the nations beyond England, in human life over all the

earth, in human nature as human nature. Young, Thomson, Gray, and all the minor poets, in their minor way, were inspired by, and expressed, that idea. The human race, not a London clique, ruled and received the poet's work. It was the first breathing of the Revolution, the first swing of that mighty movement; and it arose in England, as we shall see hereafter, before it arose in France. In it, poetry began to look forward, to leave the cabined interests of the present, to catch the airs of the future, to live in hope for man and with an ideal aim for him. It began, in fact, to get back to the natural impulses of man towards his own progress, towards the illimitable which the nature of man presages; to sail to unfolding horizons—to have, to cherish, to wish to express man's passion for development. It escaped from London into the world, from artificial into natural thinking on the subject of mankind.

And, along with this outlook to the future of man in which fresh life was hoped for, there was also, and concordant with it, a reversion to the past when life was natural, when convention scarcely existed, when the artificial was all but unknown, and men spoke, wrote, acted and thought out of the impulsive passion of the moment.

In the hunger for something fresh, vital and spontaneous in poetry as well as in life, there arose among the younger literary men an eager desire to read, study and comment upon the early Elizabethan poetry, where human nature had its fresh and ardent way. Shakespeare, Spenser and others were freshly worked at and imitated. They went even further back, and, like Dryden, when he wanted refreshment, drank

deep of the natural humanity in the poetry of Chaucer. This reversion to naturalism, that is, to the treatment in poetry of frank human nature in its common passions and in open, unstudied speech, was, side by side with the forward impulse to the emancipation of poetry in the future, one of the springs which, arising at this time, was destined to become a mighty river of natural thought and feeling. Among other matters, it annihilated the one metre in which nearly all important poetry was written by Pope and his congeners; which by its use had increased, almost made necessary, the conventionality and artificial phrasing of verse. Poetry was tied down by this metre to one form; and it was a form in which passion and natural expression of thought did not receive an easy shape. The lyric measures, so various, so fruitful in Elizabeth's time, and for some time after, were all but lost. They now began to enter again into poetry. They always do, when the love of what is natural begins, after a period of conventional feeling and thinking, to be vivid in the human race, or in any society. New thoughts awake new measures. New feeling will not be limited to one form. They claim their own expression in changing lyric forms. The lyric had not altogether died in Dryden. It may be said to have perished in Pope and its perishing marks the perishing of passion in poetry. The world could not stand that loss, and before Pope's death the natural passion of human nature began to re-create the lyric.

Yet Pope gave something to Nature and Passion, theoretically. A man, like him, of consummate wit, could not fail to recognise the part which natural passion plays in human life. But he had lost the power,

through following artificial conventions in poetry, of expressing it. He said that happiness lay in the satisfaction of our passions, even in those that religion condemns, and he believed in their natural goodness. From their diverse struggles is born at last, so he seems to think, the harmony of the body and the soul, and the veritable personality of man. But he restrained the reckless abandonment of the passions by the curb of social necessities. One must not injure society. These views, philosophically stated, had much influence on Rousseau, and the vague and sentimental benevolence which was connected with the doctrine of curbing the passions by social considerations, wrought also on Voltaire. Pope had much to do with the gushing philanthropy which preceded the French Revolution; and which, divorced from the duties of man and only dwelling on his rights, ended in, even produced, the savage cruelty, the blind slaughter of the Terror of the Revolution. Bloody revenge is often the result of philosophic philanthropy. It may be said that in this Pope himself laid down one of the foundations of naturalism—that is, of the frank, vivid, passionate expression of all that is in universal human nature. And where he was translated into other forms in another world of thought, the world, for example, which preceded the French Revolution, this may be said to be partly true. But he did not express these views, as Rousseau expressed them, in a natural manner; but in the conventional, merely intellectual forms of an artificial philosophy. They were quite devoid of that passion which Rousseau gave to them. Out of what Pope said another thing than that he intended came.

Moreover the cold Deism of Pope, with its mechanical

universe; and its God, like a steam-engine endowed with infinite steam-power; and with his man capable of no knowledge except of himself, stole away from humanity one of the highest capacities of its nature, one which was born in the earliest savage of his very nature; the passion—and no passion is deeper—of that pursuit of the unknown, the invisible, the infinite, which is at the root of all the arts and religions of mankind, which is the food of Imagination deprived of which she dies, and which impels all the romantic, passionate and natural poetry of the world. In recovering that intense desire and in finding grounds in human nature for it, Naturalism in poetry was born again, and Pope's artificial philosophy of God and Man was slain. Out of that hunger for the unknown, the impossible, the perfect, for ideal action in the hero who represented the nearest approach to the divine; out of the desire, not for a limited happiness, for a beauty which could be attained by art, but for the illimitable in joy and loveliness—out of that desire to expand and pursue for ever—arose, as a codicil to Naturalism, Romanticism. And, when the romantic poetry had begun its work on Man, it worked also on Nature. When it found in Nature, not the mechanical universe of Pope, but the living movement and life of all-pervading Thought or Love, in infinite creation, in inexhaustible forms of Beauty, it took up into its poetry of Man the poetry of Nature also. All romantic poetry welds into one substance Humanity and Nature. This was far away as yet. Naturalism preceded romance but romance was contained in it as the child is in the womb. Long after Pope was dead, the child was born. But Pope had nothing to do with it. All

he did was to carry the artificial, with all its irritating limits, to so complete a form, that men were wearied to death of it. "Give us Nature," they cried. "Give us life! Break the barriers down and let the soul out." And then, inevitably, that other cry was heard —"Give us Romance."

I have spoken so far of the rise of that Naturalism in poetry which has to do with the natural and therefore passionate representation of universal human nature; and also, in contrast to it, of the artificial poetry which preceded it and, by its ignoring of it, awakened in men a hunger for its representation. This is the more important part of the subject. Historians and critics have dwelt chiefly on that other part which has to do with the return of the love of the natural world, of Nature, as we call it; and of the absence in Pope and his comrades of any impassioned description of natural beauty. Of that we have now to treat, but the other, it will be remembered, is the vital point. This is secondary. And naturally so, for till the soul is awakened to natural and excited feeling —to the natural sense of beauty, to passionate loss of self in admiration and delight, such as a child has in things it loves,—the power to feel and love the natural world, its wildness, its peace, its sublimity, its simple charm, is also unawakened. When men ceased like Pope to view all things through intellectual conventions, and grew into seeing like children, through the heart, they saw then the soul within the outward world and the beauty which was the Form of its soul. They loved, they felt, they honoured Nature. Their eyes were opened to a new world. And with slow but doubling and redoubling passion, they pursued its

infinities, bound them up with their human spirit, drank from Nature's immortal spring and refreshed humanity; till, at last, the impulse found its accomplished expression in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley and Keats.

This love of Nature was but another aspect of the return of the poets to the natural in man. A certain love of Nature, a vital interest, which man's intelligence and feeling take in the outward world, a desire to harmonise its doings with our own, to picture them as human, to give them an intelligence and passion like our own, appears to have been implanted in the human race from the earliest times; and this seems to be another of those matters which divide us by an unfathomable gulf from the lower animals. We can trace, with Darwin, the resemblances in the brutes to the working of our conscience, of our affections, of our intellect, but we cannot find in them any of the arts, nor of the spirit which made the arts. The making, for example, of nature-myths, which is a part of early poetry, of the artistic representation of Nature—there is no trace of that in the most highly organised animal. It was in myth-making that the poetry of Nature began. When Day came walking over the hills, when Night, contending with him, pushed him over the cliffs of the horizon, when the Dragon of the Winter conquered the bright God of the Summer; when the Cows of Indra let fall from their udders the milk of the rain; when a thousand thousand pictures like these were made in all nations of the doings of the universe, when woods and streams, mountains and the waves of the sea were filled with living creatures who were their life—the poetry of Nature was born, and

man's natural interest in Nature, rising into love, was the source within us of its birth. This love of Nature, developing into multitudinous forms as the imagination of man developed, is natural from the beginning to man. When it decays in the arts, and especially in poetry, the human soul is becoming, so far, denaturalised. When it is recovered, it is a part of the rise of Naturalism. Men, that is to say, are getting back to a feeling towards the world around them which is rooted in human nature. Or, otherwise expressed, in returning to human nature, they are returning to the natural world and the love of it.

When Pope was writing, the love of Nature for itself had quite decayed. There are two great subjects of poetry. One of these—the natural world—was gone. Poetry lost half of its food. The other half of its food is human nature. That half was, of course, treated by Pope so far as he could. But we have seen how limited, how narrow and how artificial was his treatment of human nature. And this narrowness partly arose, because he had exiled the love of Nature from his poetry. When poetry is best, most healthy, most herself, she mingles together human nature and Nature, and the love of each. Human nature is first in poetry, and Nature second, but they must be together, if the poetry is to be great and passionate, simple and perceptive, imaginative and tender. It is a terrible business for poetry when it is wholly employed on man or wholly employed on Nature. In either case, the poetry becomes thin, feeble, unimaginative, incapable of giving impulse, or bringing comfort. Many have reached that by only writing about Nature. Pope reached it by only writing about man.

It had not been so before him. Chaucer only cared for quiet, gentle Nature, but for it he cared a great deal. Shakespeare, brought up in the country, bore it with him to London, and returned to die among the fields and farms and flowers. And all his poems and plays are filled with records, passionately felt, of the doings of the Universe, of the beauty of the green woods, and the mountains and the sky, of the clear streams and the wild creatures that haunted them, of the anger and the quiet of the weather. Nor is Spenser far behind him, and many of the rest of the singing birds. The Puritans did not lose this love. Milton made natural description, as a thing apart, a power, and an example, in English poetry; and, behind all the great events of Paradise Lost and Regained, Nature, in her glory and beauty, spreads her changing landscape. Marvell filled his natural world with a delicate enchantment of the spirit. The trees have ardours and delights, the grass thinks in his verse. The religious poets were not behindhand. Herbert, Vaughan, Herrick loved the wild country, each in accordance with his character. And more than half the Caroline lyrics play with the trees and fields and flowers like children. Even close before Pope, and while Dryden was alive, Nature, though more and more conventionalised, was not left without witnesses in such short pieces as Parnell's "Night Piece" and Lady Winchelsea's charming "Nightingale" and "Poem on Night"; but these were like the sudden fleeting penitences of a bad man, who, touched for a moment, remembers his childhood and celebrates or mourns over his innocence. Now, all was lost. The poets, the wits, the cultivated folk were wholly of the

town. They despised or hated a country life. Nothing in it spoke to their hearts. In all its life nothing lived for them. In Pope's poetry this reached its climax. He talked of Nature, it is true, but one hears in the set, soulless, artificial phrases of description that not a single true impulse came from her to him. The terms used and the things concerning which they are used, are in no living relation one to another. The same terms are used again and again. A dictionary of them might be made. When the poet wanted an adjective for a tree, a stream, a mountain, he dipped into a box, where half a dozen descriptive adjectives were kept in separate compartments, one for trees, one for hills, etc., and used the first in the compartment that came to hand, it mattered not which. Natural description was an artificial trick, not a passionate record of feeling. Even the Nature he described was itself artificial. He painted gardens and parks laid out in imitation of wild Nature. When he was young, the gardens were formal, like those of Versailles, which imitated the formal gardens of England. When he was middle-aged, he was one of the men who started gardens carefully wrought to represent what Nature did in the wilds. All the streams meandered like serpents, cliffs were built up, down which waterfalls fell; little groves and solitary trees hung over deep pools which had been dug out and rocks covered with moss which had been inserted. While it pretended to be Nature, it was a triumph of artifice. But he never turned to Nature herself. His wild garden was as conventional as his description.

This was a sad condition of things, and we may be sure that there were a number of persons who longed

for some expression of the unconscious feelings of awe, wonder and loveliness which Nature brought to their hearts; or who, wearied out with artificial Nature, desired the real thing. Pope himself half predicted this reaction. He paints Villario who had spent years in making a park in imitation of Nature, and who was sick of the whole thing:

> Enjoy them you! Villario can no more;
> Tired of the scene pastures and fountains yield,
> He finds at last he better loves a field.

And there was coming, even now before Pope had run half his career, a man who was partly to satisfy this cry, and heal this weariness. The hour had come and with the hour the man. In 1726, before Pope had published the "Dunciad" or the "Essay on Man" or the "Moral Essays," a little Scotchman, poorly dressed and hungry, came up to London with the MS. of his poem of "Winter," the first of the "Seasons," in his pocket. This was James Thomson, with whom the Naturalist poetry, both for human nature and Nature, began in modern English literature.

CHAPTER II

YOUNG AND THOMSON

In our previous study it was explained what is here meant by Naturalism in poetry. It was the return of poetry—in strong contrast with an artificial society and its literature—to a natural treatment, in unstudied song, of our common human nature in all its developments over the known world. It treated human nature, not only in the city, but in the country, not only among the cultivated, but among all classes, not only in England, but in all nations. The divisions made by class, by caste, by national hatreds and prejudices, by climate and by different grades of civilisation, were to disappear before it, and had already begun to disappear. It desired to get down to the roots of human nature, to its primal passions, affections, rights and duties, and to represent them in their thought and action; especially those of them which were common to all, and on the ground of which all men were as one. In this, it was the herald of the revolutionary ideas concerning man which were so stormily embodied in the French Revolution; which, before that Revolution, were thrown into his own shape of them by Rousseau; Rousseau, on whom this English movement had a profound and far-reaching influence.

Romanticism, which has been too much confused with Naturalism, was one of its offshoots; was contained in it—a part of it, but not its whole. A great

deal of the naturalistic poetry was not at all romantic. It described, *e.g.*, the life of the poor as it was, and, in Crabbe, with the sternest reality. It concerned itself with the political and economic conditions of the labourer. It spoke of man as man. It contrasted the state of the oppressed with the state of the tyrants who oppressed them. It spoke of animals, birds and beasts and of man in his relation to them. It described Nature as she lay before the poet's eyes, in plain words; with none of those metaphysical and spiritual ideas which the Romantic connected with her. That which lay beneath her appearance, the spiritual substance, which the romantic poet was driven to conceive, is not to be found in a naturalist poet like James Thomson. He knew nothing in himself of the all-pervading, all-creating Thought which in Wordsworth's mind entered into, and was the soul of, Nature, nay, was Nature. He knew nothing of the creative Love which, in the thought of Shelley, kindled the universe it had first created and continued to create. He only catalogued, but with a seeing eye, that which he saw.[1] His God, like Pope's, was not *in* but outside of Nature, and this was not romantic; but yet, unlike Pope's, He was a God who had personally and with affection to do with Man; and this was pure Naturalism; not, by any means, pure Romance.

In these points, and in many others, the Naturalist poets were not romantic. They might be called—without the modern meaning which has grown round the work—realistic. But Romance yearns for and desires the ideal. It looks back to an ideal past, which, indeed, it has itself made ideal; and finds there the

[1] "The visible world is visible to me."—THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

beauty, the joy in life, the action it desires; and this was the position of Walter Scott. It delights to describe passionate love raised to its highest power of joy or sorrow. All human action at high or heroic pressure was its subject. But the action had to be noble, loyal, true, filled and directed by the impalpable ideals of sensitive honour. Hence chivalry and all the chivalric elements in life were dear to it; and war; and love of women; and sacrifice of self for her, and for the ideals of patriotism, of friendship, of faithfulness to comrades. Death was loved rather than life bought by fear, or a lie, or dishonour. Life was raised into the heroic ideal, above the ordinary common-sense view of it. These were some of the subjects of romantic poetry. All the fine history of the past was taken into it.

It was in the creation of such a past that Walter Scott found his Romance. It was in searching back into such a past ideal of life that Gray borrowed the eagerness with which he treated in his Odes the struggle of Wales against Edward, and the Northern stories. It was brooding on such an ideal of life that stirred Chatterton into the first efforts of his Muse. It was the same excitement that set Macpherson to work. It was the same that so strongly wrought on Dr. Percy that he not only collected the old ballads, but wrote them up himself into a book which had an immense influence on the romantic movement: which brought the passion and power of Romance into the common homes of England, into the hearts of the people out of whom the ballads themselves had come.

But the romantic spirit was not satisfied only with the past. Its driving spirit was the idealisation of human life. And there were many who, looking into the

splendour, as it seemed to them, of life in the past, and knowing that it had passed away, felt the sadness which is so deep in Walter Scott, yet did not stay in it. They were too inspired by hope to remain in it. These looked forward; and Romance in them predicted a regenerated, perfected humanity. The passion for the Golden Age, not in the past but in the future, the hunger for human perfection, which struck its first bold note in Cowper, and which reached its finest music in Shelley, was, as well as delight in the past, a result of the romantic spirit; and in other forms than Shelley gave it, it still influences, still lives in modern poetry. Eager Delight in the past—Sadness for its loss—eager Hope for the future—Joy in its contemplation. These were vital elements in the romantic movement. They were not elements in the first Naturalists.

Then, as we have seen, the Romantic left the real, the known, the sights and sounds and objects of sense behind; and went after the impossible, the invisible, the perfect, the unattainable on earth, the unreached beauty, the eternal joys, the things the spirit could conceive, but the senses could not perceive. All the great Nature myths, made by the childish imagination of men, were, when afterwards they were known as myths, sure to become the subjects of the romantic poet; and indeed had been (but not known as myths) an element in old Romance. All Fairy-land, created of old by Romance, the invisible world of beings that haunted the woods and streams and lived in the moon's dim light, again became the pleasure of Romanticism, but it changed its form. Oberon and Titania died, and the fairies of the flowers; but every flower had its

own spirit, and every stream its own goddess to a poet like Keats; and Wordsworth conceived a soul in every lonely place in the hills; and Shelley placed, even in every thin bubble of vapour that the sun exhales from lake or river, and which floats invisible, a living lord of its little world; so intense was his sense of love and life in things.

It was a higher reach when the Romantic pursued after the perfect Ideas of things of which he had imperfect experience; and hungered and thirsted to realise that which he knew he could never realise on earth—the absolute Beauty, the perfect Love, the virginal Truth, the immortal Life. This was a temper of the soul the mere Naturalist did not conceive or know; and, when it was conjoined with faith in God, it sent the Romantic beyond this world into eternity, where he should reach the perfect, realise his ideals, see the absolute Beauty face to face, and have power to shape it; and many are the poets who have pursued after, and realised in verse, this part of the Romantic's temper.

This, and much more, was the positive in Romanticism. Negatively, it was opposed to Classicism. The classic poets, such as Homer; the Greek and Latin dramatists, Vergil and the rest, were not opposed to Naturalism. On the contrary, they were naturalistic. Human nature, in its noble thought and action, resistance to or endurance of fate, purifying its soul through struggle, meeting the stern decrees of the Gods with courage, without insolence, but with an equal mind in the tragic and the comic of life—human nature showing its powers, moods, passions, conscience and intelligence in varied circumstances, painted with

reality, sympathy, even with sorrowful sternness—that was what the great Classic desired to render—that was his subject. He was so far a pure Naturalist. But he was not a Romantic, in the sense in which the word is used here, except perhaps in the "Odyssey" of Homer. I do not speak of the later Greek writers, who did become romantic.

The great classic writers in poetry—except Plato in prose—did not pursue the unknown, the ideal, the invisible, though they did conceive the heroic. Their main object was to describe human nature as it actually was, when inspired by great passions, or subjected to tragic circumstance, in which human and natural duties were involved; and beyond, presiding over circumstance and action, inevitable Law. The romantic poet did not imagine the world in that fashion.

But the main difference between them was in the method of their art. The classic poet did his work according to laws, in obedience to rules long since laid down as it were by Beauty herself. The early romantic poet was on the whole lawless. He put rules aside. What had been done well in the past did not command his work or indeed his reverence. He desired what was new. He sought new methods to express his new ideas. He made a fresh style for himself. He attempted things not done in the past. Indeed, when he was hot with thought and passion, he flung the whole past of poetry behind him. Of course, he lost measure, purity of note, temperance in expression; the spirit of order, tranquillity, clearness, simplicity; the power to restrain extremes, whether of ornament, illustration, or the use of copious material; the knowledge of where to stop, of what to leave out. And it is to this loss that we

owe the bad composition, the violence, the obscurity, the sensationalism, the crude colour, crude phrases, the piling up of words on words, with which the romantic poet has far too much to do.

Nevertheless, the Classicism of English poetry had now, at this time, become a dry, withered tree. It had lost all the noble Naturalism of the great classic poets. It was nothing more than the following of certain classic methods of verse, composition and phrase, without feeling, or Nature. These methods and rules, having lost their heart, were summoned to die, and they met their doom. They had ruled poetry before and for a great part of the eighteenth century. And their rule had become oppressive. They limited the natural outgoings of the soul of poets, forced them to write in settled metres and in a settled form; in neither of which the fresher thoughts and feelings of men could find easy and natural expression; and finally insisted on their writing in one metre only. Poets were under the Law, not under Grace. And the Law had lost the life it originally possessed, and had become merely ceremonial—a law of sin and death to the poetic spirit longing to be free to speak, in whatever way it liked, of all it thought and felt. A great reaction against the oppression of this worn-out and ceremonial classicism was sure to come. It was now at hand, and the immediate result was the creation of fresh lyrical measures, every fresh feeling freely seeking its own form of expression; the recovery of the Elizabethan freedom; a host of new experiments in poetry, a rush forward into the liberty of a new poetic life. Blank verse was restored by Thomson and Young. Gray and Collins re-created the Ode and the Lyric. When Burns, Blake

and Cowper came, poetic expression had altogether escaped from the classic tyrannies.

At the same time—curiously as some would say, but naturally, as I think—the poets, having put aside the artificial Classicism of Pope, and its false limits, went back to the great models of classic poetry, studied them, not through the spectacles of Pope and his school, but with their own eyes and heart. And they found them not artificial, but natural; and employed directly on universal human nature. This fell in with, and assisted, the growing Naturalism and was taken up into it. Collins and Gray endeavoured to revive in poetry "the just designs of Greece." But they did this with the freedom that the romantic spirit nourished in them. There was then, in this transition period, a mingling together of the classic and the romantic spirit, along with the Naturalism of both, which produced a peculiar type of poetry, an isolated type. And when we wish to realise what that type was, we should read the poems of Gray and Collins. They stand alone in England. Differing from one another in many ways, they are at one in this: they represent a combination of the classic spirit with romantic methods, and sometimes romantic thinking. They add Naturalism to both, but the Naturalism is not pure. It is still affected by a lingering conventionality in their diction. They had not quite got clear of Pope and his ways.

I have now tried to describe some of the elements of this time of change and growth—the artificial poetry of Pope and his school; the revolt from that into Naturalism, into a direct treatment, with the poet's eye fixed steadily on his subject, of universal human nature and of the natural world. This brought with it the element

of cosmopolitanism—interest in the whole known world—in man as man. Then came the awakening of the romantic spirit; first shown in the escape from the classic rules and measures as they were ceremonialised into laws that limited the freedom of poetry; and once that spirit was born it grew with speed in France and England. Then came, in Gray and Collins, the return, not to the classic rules, but to the true classic Naturalism, with a free reverence for the classic Temperance. Mingled with all this change, there was a profound melancholy which was romantic; and a great development of the love of wild and solitary Nature, which was Naturalism. Thus, in 1730, and in the years that followed, we are at the beginning of things; we watch the first efforts of a new life in poetry. All the new elements were as yet uncombined, each of them running now in one direction, now in another; making unrelated experiments, having no clear tendency. No master mind as yet absorbed them and united their energies towards one goal. There was fermentation, but not much wine.

This confusion makes the progress of the new life of poetry difficult to follow. The best way to expose it is to dwell on the work of the more important men who carried it forward. Each of these did his own part in the making of the novel world of song. The first of these men was Edward Young, the second was James Thomson. I will take Young first, though the "Seasons" preceded the "Night-Thoughts" by nearly ten years. For Thomson in this Progress of Poetry holds and deserves the most important place.

Young did not do half so much to forward it, nor was he so good a poet. He was more a swelling rhetorician

who clothed poetical commonplaces in gorgeous oratorical garments. His set outcries concerning Nature, and Night, and Time, and other abstractions of Fancy, are written to the music of a rolling, sometimes majestic blank verse and are conducted like a pompous procession not of men and women but of images of them. The verse, with its full-sounding words, conceals the poverty and commonness of the ideas. When his poetry is translated, as for instance into French prose, one sees the nakedness of the land. The ideas—if we may call them so—have lost the evaporating grandeur, so far as it goes, of the verse. Now and again, he has passages of natural and noble poetry, whenever, as it were by chance, he happened to be sincere, and then the real excellence of his verse being supported by true feeling and the unsought-for thoughts that belong to it, makes his work fine; but this is rare. And it is scarcely worth a student's time to do more than dip into Young, if he be in search of poetry.

All the same, the influence, which one may truly call enormous, he had on the Continent, both on France and Germany; the "general fermentation," even translated, that his "Nights" made among a nation frivolous and gay, makes us understand that there was more in him than we can see. The fact is, however, not that there was more good stuff in him than we see, but that the sentimental, serious melancholy he voiced in his subject had become a tendency of the time. It was a reaction from the light, trivial, gay, satirical poetry which preceded it—a new matter for imagination and fancy to work upon. This melancholy, this brooding on the sadness of life and death, on the sorrowful fates of men, and on all the images

and scenes in Nature; moonlight, and night, and the grasses of graves and the dim, hoarse rolling of the sea —was the first element, in time, of the new romantic movement; and Young was its voice. It was a sadness which had something enchanting in it, both for youth and age. It soothed the old—it dramatised life for the young—it seemed momentarily to fill the vast void which the contemplation of the immensity of Nature and the limited and transient nature of man left in the soul. There was an elegiac pleasure in it. It seemed profound, and was shallow; it seemed full of thought, it was only full of self-contemplation. It hit the time and its temper—it hit the reaction.

And for twenty years Young was incessantly translated both into prose and verse on the Continent; and not only his "Nights," but his other work. And he lasted far beyond those twenty years. Voltaire mocked him, but scarcely any other foreigner, save Grimm, who was cold. Rousseau dipped deeply into him, and drew from him support for his own profound melancholy. Diderot admired him. Robespierre kept him by his bedside during the Terror. Camille Desmoulins read him, with Hervey's "Meditation on Tombs," the night before his execution. Burns knew him off by heart. Chateaubriand, Byron (to descend to later times), all the leading Romantics in France and England, read and fed with him their melancholy, that melancholy which is, I repeat, one of the roots of the romantic movement —a root which grew gradually in England into form —passing through Gray, Collins, Beattie, the Wartons, Cowper, till it culminated in Byron and Walter Scott.

For this, Young is worth our study. We see the

plant when first it shot above the earth. Let us read one passage so that we may feel his way and hear the pomp of his verse.

> Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep!
> He, like the world, his ready visit pays
> Where Fortune smiles; the wretched he forsakes;
> Swift on his downy pinion flies from woe,
> And lights on lids unsullied with a tear.
> From short (as usual) and disturbed repose
> I wake: how happy they who wake no more!
> Yet that were vain, if dreams infest the grave.
> I wake, emerging from a sea of dreams
> Tumultuous; where my wrecked desponding thought
> From wave to wave of fancied misery
> At random drove, her helm of reason lost.
> Though now restored, 'tis only change of pain—
> A bitter change!—severer for severe;
> The day too short for my distress; and night,
> E'en in the zenith of her dark domain,
> Is sunshine to the colour of my fate.
> Night, sable goddess! from her ebon throne,
> In rayless majesty, now stretches forth
> Her leaden sceptre o'er a slumbering world.
> Silence how dead! and darkness how profound!
> Nor eye nor listening ear an object finds.
> Creation sleeps. 'Tis as the general pulse
> Of life stood still, and Nature made a pause,
> An awful pause! prophetic of her end.
> And let her prophecy be soon fulfilled!
> Fate! drop the curtain; I can lose no more.

It is enough for us. We feel in it that the melancholy has been carried into extremes—such extremes as a man who has discovered a new vein is likely to indulge himself in. And the sepulchral gloom is so deep that one also suspects its sincerity. And we suspect it justly. Young was not sincere. The lingering insincerity of the society to which he belonged stole into

his work, as it had stolen into his character. He was in reality not fond either of a gloomy life, or of night, or of graves; nor did he think much of those miseries of mankind of which he was said to have written the sublimest elegy. He insatiably pursued the comforts and wealth of life. The story of Narcissa, his daughter, which all Europe mourned over, was a lie. He multiplied his children that he might describe how relentless fate had slain them one after another. He was melancholy, but he wrought up his melancholy, embroidered it, deepened it, till it lost all truth; and the legend that he wrote his 10,000 verses in the "Complaint" by the light of one candle burning in a skull is the measure and the image of his unreality. Nevertheless, his work fell in with and nourished a general tendency. We must never forget that Young was the forerunner and the source of one of the great romantic tendencies in poetry—a tendency which endures, even to the present day; nor must we forget, if we wish to be accurate in stating his place in this romantic melancholy, that it was the melancholy of the present, of man as seen in his own time—that it had nothing to do with that other branch of the romantic melancholy, the sad regret for the vanished splendours of the past.

James Thomson was far more of a poet than Young. He had true vision, and a touch, not much more, of the faculty divine. Had he had more genius—especially that quality of it which so places in words the thought, or the description, or the passion of the hour, that the reader sees and feels a whole world open before him of his thoughts and passions concerning the subject—the genius which leaves the suggestion, unadded to, unembroidered—knowing exactly when to stop and

what to leave—Thomson would have been a great poet. But in his outbursts of joy and adoration, in his descriptions of natural beauty, in his idyllic tales, he piled addition on addition, epithet on epithet, rhetoric on rhetoric, till the whole was weakened. Nor had he any sense of composition, save that which presides over a patch-work quilt. In the "Seasons," one description succeeds another, one series of reflections another, without any natural cohesion—patch after patch. And the large additions he made afterwards to the poem were stuck in anywhere, without any attempt to unite them vitally to the previous work. The composition of the "Castle of Indolence" is entirely bad, though the poetry is good. Parts of it, which no true composer could have endured, are actually stupid, and when one suddenly comes upon them and on certain vulgarities in them in the midst of noble poetry, a painful jar is inevitably felt. One cannot understand how Thomson was so insensitive as to write or publish them—how he did not himself feel the jar. He was a true poet, but not a great one.

He cannot be called one of the romantic poets. He was a Naturalist. The only trace of the romantic spirit in him is in the idylls which he inserts into his poem of the "Seasons" and which have a mild flavour of romance. They had their pleasant rusticity and must have been read with a fresh delight by people who were wearied out with the poetry of the town. And they not only gave pleasure to the English, but to the Continent. They, and the Idylls of Gessner, were imitated, enjoyed, all over Germany and France, and almost made a school. But they were much more naturalist than romantic; not so purely naturalist as

Wordsworth's tales of Cumberland life, for they were tricked out with conventional diction and ornament, but as little fit to be called romantic as Wordsworth's "Michael" or "The Brothers."

Thomson was a Naturalist in his cosmopolitanism. He carried, I may say for the first time in English poetry, the sympathies of the poet beyond the society of the city, beyond the bounds of England over the world. And it was not only the greater nations on whose inhabitants and their humanity he dwelt, but the small, remote, unvisited peoples. He brought them into range of England's sympathies. He made the men of London feel with man as man; and powerful in this way was his influence on Rousseau, on all the precursors of the revolutionary ideas concerning the natural unity of the human race. He takes us to the Tropics; to their vegetation, climate, rivers, animals, and to the human life of those who dwell therein; to "Niger's yellow stream" and "Ganges' sacred wave" to Peru, Nubia, Abyssinia, Egypt, the Andes and the mighty rivers of South America; to Italy, the Alps, Spain, to Russia, its people and its exiles, to Lapland and its homely sons, to Iceland, Greenland and St. Kilda's lonely isle; and everywhere his world-wide sympathy with liberty, his hatred of oppression, his pleasure in simple, homelike life, in the common doing and welfare of silent, unrecorded humanity, charm us in his page.

This cosmopolitan interest, I repeat, was a vital and continuous element in the Naturalist movement; and it predicted and assisted the Revolution. Goldsmith took it up and sent it on; Cowper enlarged it and made it more tender; and when the French

Revolution had condensed its scattered elements into one idea, this mastered Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, each in a different fashion, each with a different power and passion.

Thomson was even more Naturalist when he left the society of cities and cultured castes to record the life, the pleasures, the sorrows, the daily doings of the rustic and the poor—their simple lives and loves—to sorrow with their plaint, to describe their work and praise its noble patience, and to frame around this affectionate picture of them the splendours and beauty of wild Nature. The poem is full of gracious and quiet humanity in its simplicity and it is no wonder it was read with pleasure by folk who, tired of fine society and satire, artificial philosophy and culture, desired to find natural humanity and simple living brought before their eyes. He began the poetry of the poor, the shepherd, the ploughman, the woodman, the farmer-statesman. And he recorded their life and work through Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

We may doubt whether the folk in London and abroad cared themselves for this simple humanity. The time for that caring was not yet come. Thomson did care, for he had lived with the rustic world and knew its worth. What they liked in his poetry was only its novelty. It was fresh, it gave them a new sensation; and everyone began to cry—"Let us get back to the natural life of men," without in the slightest degree meaning to do so. What Rousseau did for France with more energy and more reality, Thomson did for England; and Thomson was the forerunner of Rousseau in this work.

In doing this, we must not forget that he did not

break away completely from the school of Pope. Certain of its traditions entered into his poetry. Again and again he introduces into his descriptive poetry gushes of philanthropic philosophy, on the grandeur and immensity of God, on the moral nature of man, on immortality, on the marriage state as the foundation of society, on the evils of luxury, on the misery of cities, on the punishment of oppression. They are treated in a different way from that in which Pope would have treated them; they breathe more the atmosphere of Addison and Steele, but they do belong to, and hark back to the school from which in other points he broke away. It is well to record the point where he links back to the previous poetry.

But the point at which he is quite new, which started a new poetry, which gives him his crowning place in English song, where he was most the Naturalist, not the Romantic, though the Romantics took up his work into theirs—was his natural description; his love of Nature for her own sake. He not only restored natural description to poetry—it had existed before him, as we have seen—but he made a new kind of it—direct description of the doings and appearance of Nature; without any reference to man—for her own sake. Of none of the poets who followed him, except perhaps Robert Blomfield, can this be said, till we arrive at Wordsworth. In Gray and Collins and in the rest, Nature is painted as a background to human life, a secondary scene. But Thomson paints her as she is, and as she acts, and while he does so, man is secondary, introduced as one of the transient elements in the storm, the rising of the morning, the calm of port, the approach of night, the starry sky. This was unknown

before. This is original—the beginning of a new subject, of a new world of verse.

The question suggests itself:—How did this new element—the direct, unconventionalised, detailed description of Nature, with man introduced only as one of the other animals in the scene, arise suddenly in the midst of a poetry like Pope's, where "wild Nature" was that of parks in the suburbs of London?

I have said that these literary surprises seem to be sudden, but are not. They have had their germs, their growth; and the natural description in the "Seasons," even in its specialities, had its own root. It came from Scotland, and was of Scottish descent. It did not arise in England or out of English poetry on this side of the Border. It bears only a slight relation to the poetry of natural description in Shakespeare, Milton or the rest of its predecessors—such as, for example, the reading of Spenser may have suggested to the poet. The natural description in the "Castle of Indolence," which is a poem steeped in Spenser, is of a different type from that in the "Seasons." What we have in the "Seasons" is a child of Scottish poetry; and it travelled to London in Thomson's pocket—quite a stranger—and emerged to the amazement of the literary world, which had never read anything quite like it before, when the poem of "Winter" appeared. But this kind of descriptive poetry was no stranger in Scotland. It had flourished there, when Henry VII. and Henry VIII. were kings; at a time when England was quite incapable of writing any poetry of natural description, when on the whole she did not care a pin for the beauty of Nature. Robert Henryson in the fifteenth century, William Dunbar at the beginning

of the sixteenth, Gawin Douglas in the same century, but later, all described the scenery of their own country with close accuracy, with their eye on the objects described; without any conventionality save a touch of Chaucer's method; with an extraordinary love of colour, and with an evident love of what they saw. Nor was it ordered gardens, or still rivers, or cultivated country, or woodland under gentle skies, that they described, but the wild country of the moors, and the streams in spate, and the bitter frost and storms of winter, and the suffering land—their native scenery.

This power, which England only gained fully in the nineteenth century, Scotland had in the sixteenth; and I have always said and still maintain that it descended to the Lowland poets from the strong admixture of Celtic blood which prevailed over the whole of the south-west of Scotland above the border; and which extended much further than men think to the south-east. The Celtic spirit had its way, and added to the English blood in Scotland its own natural love of wild Nature.

This love of Nature somewhat decayed in Scotland during the furious political and religious strifes of the age of the Stuarts, but it emerged again in Allan Ramsay, who was a pure Naturalist, both as regards human nature, and Nature herself—and now it appeared in Thomson, who was born in Roxburghshire and educated in Edinburgh. The Celtic spirit came to London with him and has moved ever since in English verse when it treats of natural scenery.

There was one great fault in these Scottish descriptions of Nature. These poets did not compose their landscapes into a whole, nor give them any spiritual unity, nor fill them with any human passion

transferred to them by the observer. That remained for the English poets to accomplish. The famous descriptions made by Gawin Douglas of the landscape of the seasons were exactly like catalogues. They describe the streams, woods, hills, weather, one after another, in unconnected succession. If you look at Thomson's poem you will find the same method used, the same thing done. The result is that the reader is for the most part left cold. In Scottish poetry up to Thomson, there is no immanent, active, joyous life, in Nature herself or in her infinite forms, such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats bestowed upon her, and in bestowing warmed our hearts.

Again, the scenery these old Scottish poets described was that of their own land, the land they passionately loved, for which they fought and died. Even when, following Chaucer, they adopted his method of beginning a poem, they did not use his scenery. They inserted into their Chaucerian framework, a picture of their own rough wilds and stormy seas. This saved them from descriptive conventions and diction; and this added a certain passion to their descriptive work—a patriotic warmth, which, while it did not warm their description of the scenery itself, warmed their vision of the land to which the scenery belonged. Thomson, when he is at his best, is describing his own Scottish scenery. And his finest, clearest, most accurate descriptions were written either in Scotland, or in memory—in recollective love of natural scenes in Scotland. When he got to London a certain amount of convention stole into his descriptions and his diction. He began to use the stock adjectives, and it is not difficult to trace the influence of Pope and others on his work.

But the Scottish element—the Scottish love of Nature for herself, remains—and it electrified London and Germany and France; and all the more because it was couched in a swelling, clashing, grandiose diction of his own, which pleased the classic ear of France and England, and which at times is so full of sound that it even has its influence upon us, who though taught to love simplicity of phrase, like now and again a piece of sonorous diction.

There is a little more to say of Thomson, but this must be reserved for our next discussion, which will deal mainly with Collins and Gray.

CHAPTER III

COLLINS AND GRAY

We have now seen that both Young and Thomson were important figures in the transition between Pope and Wordsworth. They initiated that transition; and both of them brought into it elements which have continued, under diverse forms, and diverse atmospheres of thought, to exist in poetry up to the present day. It is on these continuous elements that we should chiefly fix our minds, especially when we consider the poets and the history of a transition period in literature. What *lasts* is the important thing, and the recognition and knowledge of it should underlie all criticism. It is interesting, of course, to trace in Thomson and Young the links in their work which tie them back to the school and practice of Pope; but it is ten times more important to trace in them the rise of the new well-heads of thought and feeling, expressed in novel verse, which, of little copiousness at first, soon became plenteous rivulets, and were joined, as they flowed down the mountain to the plain of a new age, by other streams year after year, that bore with them not only thought and feeling related to the original sources, but also new elements, new subjects and new melodies, until that which was but a mountain rill became, when it reached the plains, a mighty river, charged with a thousand forms of novel feelings and thoughts, and carrying the

same thoughts and feelings onward into the future to find new and always newer forms.

The spirit of Cosmopolitanism, the consideration of universal man all over the world, and the sympathy with the whole race, is one of the elements which Thomson re-introduced into English poetry. It has never ceased to influence that poetry from then till now. It was a part of what we have called Naturalism. Another element, quite new in its way, which Thomson started on its career, was the treatment of Nature, as separate from man, for its own beauty and its own sake. That also was vital; that not only continued, but was destined to a vast development, and it develops still. It was also a part of Naturalism. And it contained in it, as we saw, a curious throw-back to the previous Scottish poets—a matter which has not been enough investigated, and which is especially interesting to those who desire to trace in the past of poetry the germs of the plants which have flowered in the present.

Another element, destined also to endure, but of far less importance than the other two, seems, though in a slight degree, to have been initiated by Thomson. This was, in his later years, a re-awakening of interest in the romantic poetry of the Elizabethans, and at this point we may call Thomson not only Naturalist, but, in some sort, Romantic. "The Castle of Indolence" recalls Spenser, and is, in fact, imitated from him, but with an original colour and feeling, for Thomson had this in common with poets who rise above the common level—that in whatever he wrote, even when he wrote badly, he is individual, and, when imitative, imitative in his own way. He took the method, the metre, the manner of Spenser in this poem, but he

filled them with himself. It is Thomson's body in the clothes of Spenser.

It is plain then that men were stretching out their hands to a poetry which should deal, as Spenser did, with the just conduct of life in a romantic spirit, and were glad to add to that the machinery of Romance to vivify and illuminate its appeal to conduct. But Thomson did this with great inequality. The natural description of the Valley where Indolence keeps his victims—the scenery of the Palace rooms—the description of the personages in the allegory is good, in places very good, but everything tumbles into artistic ruin in the second book, where he applies himself to the moral and commercial aspect of the subject. The poem is, like Scylla, a fair woman above, a monster below.

We have noticed this touch of Romanticism in Thomson, this recurrence to the Elizabethan imagination of a spiritual world made objective by allegory, this linking back to the past mastery of passion and thought before Pope which, after Thomson, became a habit with the poets, and which never has failed since to continue as a habit (all the poets of the nineteenth century keeping themselves religiously in touch with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and the rest, keeping up, to express it rudely, their romantic connexions) because there is nothing of more importance to the student or the critic of English poetry than that he should always not only feel but understand that all the diverse developments of that poetry are branches of one tree and have vital connexions with one another. He should always be looking out for such links and connexions. It is a mistake for critics and students to

separate poetic periods too much from one another; to isolate for critical consideration this or that school. There is no school which does not hark back to the past poetry, none which does not contain in it the germs of the future poetry. English poetry is one tree, with an organic unity, and all its developments, however strange, share in the life of the whole and are linked to the being of one another. None of them is an isolated growth. It is a good exercise for students to trace these connexions either back to the past or onwards to the future until at last they see before their intellectual eye the whole living, mighty tree, with its multitudinous branches, and foliage spreading and leaping from one root and every day expanding. Young belongs, in his satires, in his philosophical disquisitions, in his attempt to class all mankind together in the framework of one universal passion—the passion of fame—to the school of Pope. But in his creation of a romantic melancholy as the attitude of the poet's mind towards the world, he initiated a new element, pregnant with a thousand poetic children in the future.

Thomson is linked back, in his treatment of Nature, to the ancient Scottish poets. He brought that view of Nature to England and developed it there in an English fashion. In doing so, he started in this country a new form of poetry, destined to an enormous development in the nineteenth century—the poetry which loved Nature and described her, apart from man, for her own sake. On the other hand, when he came to London, the work of Dryden and Pope laid hold upon him and he added to his poetic production the philosophy, the Deism (but with a personal touch of his

own), and the character-painting of Pope. Not only then to the Scottish poetry but to the poetry of Dryden and Pope, is Thomson vitally connected. As in all transition periods especially he, as Young also, touches the past with one hand and the future with another. And all the other poets who followed him, until the new poetry was fully established, do the same.

We now leave Thomson behind and pass to Collins and Gray. They make the next step, but they are still connected with the school of Dryden and Pope by a certain artificial or conventional note in their diction, by a certain want of frank Naturalism; so that, even in their beautiful work, a note of commonplace is heard, a prosaic note. This is less in Collins than in Gray, but, in its occurrence in the poetry of both, they are together. The juxtaposition of their names, at this point, is not unfitting. At another point they are also together. They both went back, in search of Nature and Beauty, not to Horace for an impulse to satirical poetry, or indeed to any of the Romans, not even to Vergil, but to the great nobility, simplicity and solid art of the Greek poets of the finer time—Gray more than Collins, but Collins with equal determination and an equal reverence for the Greek mastery and excellence. "Let us return," they said, "to the best masters, in order to know best how to shape our own work into beauty and dignity and exquisiteness." They did not reach the excellence they admired, but their aspiration had a profound effect on the career of the larger number of the English poets of the nineteenth century. Men rejected the artificial Classicism, with its limiting rules, of Pope, and pursued, not only after the noble, simple and passionate excellence of the

Greek work, but also after the measured, temperate, selective, careful exquisiteness of the phrasing of a poet like Vergil. Moreover, they endeavoured to combine with this emulation of the classic excellence the love of the beautiful, as best disclosed in a close but ideal representation of Nature; both in the soul of man and in the images of the natural world. It was as yet only an endeavour, but it was begun.

Collins and Gray began this movement, but they lived in a prosaic age and in an age which imposed on them an artificial, not a natural, expression of their thoughts. And this prevented their work, under this new Greek impulse, from being as excellent as it might have been at another time in the history of literature. Had they been born after Wordsworth had restored the natural language of feeling to poetry, they would have been different poets indeed; and this is a point which, if I rightly remember, Matthew Arnold has made and laboured.

In these two ways—in a conventional diction which links them back to Pope and in a return to the spirit of the Greek classics—Collins and Gray may be considered as one. In other points, indeed, in their main poetic work and genius, they differed greatly from one another. The continual association of their names is a critical mistake. Collins had more natural art than Gray and desired it more. He saw and loved Simplicity, that gracious maid. She was taught by Nature to breathe her genuine thought, he said:

> In numbers warmly pure and sweetly strong.

He paints her, in Attic robe arrayed, the meek sister of Truth. It was she, he said, who alone could justly

order and arrange the flowers of poetry that Beauty had collected. Even when divine excess filled the poet's soul, it was Simplicity who could give the frenzy the true warmth; for she alone can, by her spirit of soothing, sober, tender music, raise the soul of him who reads the verse into the true temper to enjoy the verse. "The passions in hall and bower own thy power no more," and he is thinking of the dead poetry of his time:

> Faint's the cold work till thou inspire the whole,

but give me Nature—simple Nature—the still, quiet, natural passion of the heart. There is my happiness; there my genius breathes with ease and loves its work:

> I only seek to find thy temperate vale,
> Where oft my reed might sound
> To maids and shepherds round,
> And all thy sons, O Nature! learn my tale.

These are the views concerning poetry he expresses in the "Ode to Simplicity." They are not the views of Gray—they are the views of Wordsworth—and Collins first struck this high note of Naturalism. Rising through all the conventional phrasing of the time, through its allegorising and personifying way of representing thought and emotion, is this natural, simple note which Collins, wiser than his age, strove to attain. And sometimes he attained it. The dirge he wrote on Thomson's death, if we leave out some of the verses, has a natural, tender grace which Cowper might not disdain:

> In yonder grave a Druid lies
> Where slowly winds the stealing wave.

So it begins, and with greater simplicity continues in the next few verses:

> Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore
> When Thames in summer wreaths is drest,
> And oft suspend the dashing oar
> To bid his gentle spirit rest.
>
> . . . . .
>
> And see, the fairy valleys fade,
> Dun night has veiled the solemn view!
> Yet once again, dear parted shade!
> Meek Nature's child! again adieu.
>
> The genial meads assigned to bless
> Thy life, shall mourn thy early doom,
> Their hinds and shepherd girls shall dress
> With simple hands thy rural tomb.

It reads as if it belonged to another time. But it still holds, in verses I have not quoted, expressions which are not quite natural. It is different in the sixth Ode. In that, Collins reaches pure, natural simplicity, a sweet and tempered grace, an imaginative sentiment full of suppressed and tender passion, and with a worthy and human subject, such as touches the universal heart of man:

> How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
> By all their country's wishes blest!
> When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
> Returns to deck their hallow'd mould,
> She there shall dress a sweeter sod
> Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.
>
> By fairy hands their knell is rung;
> By forms unseen their dirge is sung.
> There Honour comes, a pilgrim grey,
> To bless the turf that wraps their clay;
> And Freedom shall awhile repair
> To dwell a weeping hermit there.

Coleridge could not have done it better.

This natural simplicity appears in the Odes, a class

of poetry which up to this time had been the very home of artificial phrases, which pretended to passion but could not reach it. There is a studious temperance, a resolute moderation, a hunger for simplicity, in the Odes of Collins, as if he vaguely felt for a beauty and quietude beyond his power. And so much of real excellence is reached, but with some retarding element combined therewith which forbids full excellence, that pity seizes on the reader. Could the poet, we think, have only lived in a more poetic atmosphere, could he but have been transferred from 1746 to 1806, how full, how much more excellent his poetry and his production would have been! He had much more imagination, much more freedom, much more elasticity; was much nearer to Nature than Gray, and he knew better the true aims, the true concept of poetry. There is an Ode of his "On the Poetical Character," in which he describes, in opulent and noble verse, the work, the characters and the attendants of Imagination, whom here he calls Fancy, and tells how Imagination, given to Milton of old, has now left the earth; and, though pursued and longed for by himself, was not bestowed on him or on the poets of his time. Yet, as we read the poem, we feel that he is humbler than he need be. For the elements of imagination are in the verse—only not knit together, not fused into one central fire, as they would have been in the work of a greater poet; but scattered through the lines in sparkles. I quote the noble close of this Ode:

> Where is the bard whose soul can now
> Its high presuming hopes avow?
> Where he, who thinks with rapture blind
> This hallow'd work for him design'd?

High on some cliff, to heaven up-pil'd,
Of rude access, of prospect wild,
Where, tangled round the jealous steep,
Strange shapes o'erbrow the vallies deep,
And holy Genii guard the rock,
Its glooms embrown, its springs unlock,
While on its rich ambitious head
An Eden like his own lies spread,
I view that Oak the fancied glades among,
By which, as Milton lay, his ev'ning ear,
From many a cloud that dropp'd ethereal dew,
Nigh spher'd in heaven its native strains could hear,
On which that ancient trump he reach'd was hung.
Thither oft his glory greeting,
From Waller's myrtle shades retreating,
With many a vow from Hope's aspiring tongue
My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue.
In vain !—Such bliss to one alone
Of all the sons of Soul was known.
And Heav'n and Fancy, kindred powers,
Have now o'erturn'd th' inspiring bowers,
Or curtain'd close such scene from every future view.

Of a higher excellence, a better composition, a fuller and more joyous imagination, simple in phrase and yet with subdued glory of words, is the poem we all know so well—the "Ode to the Passions." The personification, which was one of the poetic tricks of the time, is so well done in it, and in so good a framework, that we forgive it. It is an Ode for Music, and written with that intention, ought to be read with the knowledge of that intention constantly before us, because that aim rules its measures, its changes of melody, the placing and choice of its words. Even without music's interpretation, the sound of the phrases and run of the metre is made the echo of the sense; and Collins changes his melodies with as much ease as Shelley,

and more conscious art, but with not so much of nature. He passes without any failure in power from the broken, abrupt words of Despair to the flowing, songful measures of Hope, and from that to the loud, furious cries of Revenge, and from that to Pity's soothing note. And he does this with the greatest pleasure and happiness in his work; and without break or chasm in his delivery. It is exactly as if we were present with the Passions singing each according to his nature, outside the cell of Music, where on the surrounding myrtles hung all her instruments ready to their hands. And there is no ill-success; though it was difficult indeed to represent in changing verse passions so opposed as melancholy and cheerfulness, or so near to one another as joy and mirth. Let us read that part of the poem and we shall follow the lovely changes of the verse and mark the choice of singing words, the delicate surprises of the happy adjectives, the felicity of the varied metres. He gives to Melancholy all the romance which then began to grow around her; and yet (as no other poet of the time), he gives even more zest to the joy and cheerfulness which, in the naturalist poetry of the nineteenth century, played, in charming contrast to melancholy, so graceful, happy and inspiring a part. And of this joy Collins, alone among the poets of the transition, was capable. It isolates him:

> With eyes uprais'd, as one inspir'd,
> Pale Melancholy sat retir'd,
> And from her wild sequester'd seat,
> In notes by distance made more sweet,
> Pour'd through the mellow horn her pensive soul:
> And dashing soft from rocks around
> Bubbling runnels join'd the sound.
> Through glades and glooms the mingled measure stole;

Or o'er some haunted stream, with fond delay,
Round an holy calm diffusing,
Love of peace, and lonely musing,
In hollow murmurs died away.
But O! how alter'd was its sprightlier tone,
When Cheerfulness, a nymph of healthiest hue,
Her bow across her shoulder flung,
Her buskins gemm'd with morning dew,
Blew an inspiring air, that dale and thicket rung,
The hunter's call to Faun and Dryad known;
The oak-crown'd sisters and their chaste-ey'd queen,
Satyrs and sylvan boys were seen
Peeping from forth their alleys green;
Brown Exercise rejoiced to hear,
And Sport leaped up, and seized his beechen spear.
Last came Joy's ecstatic trial:
He, with viny crown advancing,
First to the lively pipe his hand addressed;
But soon he saw the brisk-awakening viol,
Whose sweet, entrancing voice he lov'd the best.
They would have thought who heard the strain
They saw in Tempe's vale her native maids
Amid the festal-sounding shades
To some unwearied minstrel dancing,
While as his flying fingers kiss'd the strings,
Love fram'd with Mirth a gay fantastic round;
Loose were her tresses seen, her zone unbound,
And he, amidst her frolic play,
As if he would the charming air repay,
Shook thousand odours from his dewy wings.

That, though it lays the scene in Greece, since Collins loved the classic shore, is full of the modern romantic spirit. The two musics mingle into something different from both. Nor is it devoid, as you hear, of a charming scenery drawn from Nature, a fresh natural landscape, scarcely touched by any conventional phraseology, and with a natural rapture in it of which we have no other example till we come to Wordsworth or Shelley.

It is impossible to conceive a greater difference from the artificial landscape of Pope, from the faded phrases that he uses, than is shown in this landscape of Collins with its remoteness and solitude, with its dewy, simple phrases, with its lovely sentiment. In this, he is a child of Thomson; but it is wonderful, for they were contemporaries, how far beyond him, almost at every point, he has advanced. The landscape is no longer catalogued; it is sentimentalised in the best sense of the word. It is composed to the subject and harmonised with it; and it is filled with living figures. Coleridge —and I repeat his name, because the phrasing, the metrical movement, and the esoteric feeling of that spiritual singer continually occur to us as we read Collins —Coleridge could scarcely have done the landscape better. Moreover, his landscape is combined with the self-conscious love of the romantic elements. It has grown up around the stories of the woods and streams and their indwellers. Collins loved, says Johnson, "those flights of imagination which pass the bounds of Nature. He loved fairies, genii, giants and monsters. He delighted to rove through the meanders of enchantment, to gaze on the magnificence of golden palaces, to repose by the waterfalls of Elysian gardens. This was more the character of his inclination than his genius." We hear in these grandiloquent phrases what Johnson knew of Collins' temper of soul, and it is plain that it is the romantic temper. But it rather pervades than appears plainly in his work. It is there as a spirit, and it is as a spirit, and in the way of Collins, that it pervades the work of Coleridge and of Keats, of whose romantic effluence on Nature he was the forerunner.

To return to him as a nature-poet. The finest piece of Collins' natural description, and the most naturally passionate in feeling, is his "Ode to Evening." This poem seems to predict the poetic temper of many of his successors. It is a presage, a prophecy of the nature-poetry to come in the future. It touches here and there, and with a sweeter finger, the melancholy note of Gray; nor does it avoid to sound again the happy note of Milton; but with an original turn in the verse. There are lines in it which Shelley might have written, especially those about the sky of evening. But of all the after poets he is nearest here to the sentiment and language of Keats. Yet the thing is pure of all imitation either of Spenser, Marvell or Milton. Moreover, though it suggests the names of Shelley and Keats, it could not have been written by them. It is all his own, with his own remote sound of sweet and gracious sadness in it, the gradual dusky veil of his verse. His poetic temper and work are raised in it to their ideal power. And the rhymeless metre of the Ode, a bold novelty, which shows how quickly lyrical freedom was developing, grew naturally out of his passionate impression of many evenings, and fitted the subject as a glove fits the hand. It is so great a landmark in the history of poetry, that though it is long, we must quote it here:

ODE TO EVENING

If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
May hope, chaste Eve! to sooth thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,[1]
Thy springs and dying gales;

[1] Springs: melodies.
"He played a spring and danced it round
Beneath the gallows tree."—OLD BALLAD.

O Nymph reserv'd ! while now the bright-hair'd Sun
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed ;

Now air is hushed, save where the weak-ey'd bat
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum ;
Now teach me, Maid composed !
To breathe some softened strain,

Whose numbers stealing thro' thy dark'ning vale
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As musing slow I hail
Thy genial loved return :

For when thy folding-star arising shows
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves,
Who slept in buds the day,

And many a Nymph, who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and, lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet,
Prepare thy shadowy car :

Then let me rove some wild and heathy scene,
Or find some ruin 'midst its dreary dells,
Whose walls more awful nod
By thy religious gleams :

Or if chill blust'ring winds or driving rain
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain's sides
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy ling'ring light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves,
Or Winter, yelling thro' the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, regardful of thy quiet rule,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, smiling Peace,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And love thy favourite name!

Thomas Gray, to whom we now turn, though not so true a poet as Collins, was more remarkable in the history of this poetic transition. He opened more new veins of poetry than Collins did, and he combined within himself a larger number of new tendencies of the time. Moreover, he was a man of greater knowledge than Collins; of wider sympathies; of a more conscious art; with a staid, moral, sententious philosophy of man, partly derived from Pope, of which philosophy Collins was, I imagine, a despiser; and with a pleasant humour of which Collins was incapable; a wider, more various man, but not a greater poet. At another point they also differed. Collins was feeble of character and many circumstances were against him. He fell at last into deep depression, almost bordering on madness, and his poetic vein dried up. Gray was strong and wise of character, his circumstances were happy and, though

he suffered also from physical depression, this did not enfeeble his sane and steadfast mind. His powers remained undiminished to the end.

If we wish to know how this character of his bore upon, strengthened or enlarged his poetry, we cannot do better than read Matthew Arnold's essay upon him; which, though prefixed to extracts from his verse, says little or nothing concerning him as a poet, but very much concerning him as a man. Arnold's constant search in his later essays after the character, circumstances and society of the poets he discussed, in order to draw from these elements a critical estimate of their poetry, was useful work, provided it was kept within just limits. But he ran it into its extreme, and the extreme lowered his critical power. Finally it almost ruined it. Of course, the character of a poet has a great deal to do with his poetry, but it does not altogether make it. As far, however, as it does make it —as far as Gray's temper and life told on his poetry— we may let them alone. What Arnold has said of them could not be better said. But we must, in speaking of his poetry, mark especially the place he occupies in the growth of naturalist and romantic poetry, during this transition period.

First, an excellent scholar, he, far more than Collins, sought back to the great Classics, not as Pope did, to transfer them into modern dress, but to drench his soul with their spirit, to emulate their temperance, their high aims, their precision and clearness and, above all, their wide view of human nature. He studied them as models, but he used his study of them on his own subjects. No poet who cared for his art neglected, after him, the classic sources, however romantically

he used the results of his study. Gray and Collins learned the high secrets and methods of their art from the Greeks; but the new freedom of their spirit not only prevented them from imitation, but also urged them into individual creation. They strove to assimilate the classic spirit but to use it in their own way.

Secondly, like Collins, and with greater industry, he studied the old poets of England. He felt how close and vital was the connexion between the ancient poets and the new poetry of his own day. He knew his Chaucer well. He wrote an essay on Lydgate. He loved the great Elizabethans—Spenser, Shakespeare and the rest. He read his Milton continuously. He projected a history of English poetry; and one regrets, near as he was to Dryden and Pope, that he did not trace their influence and fix their place in English poetry.

In doing this, he was continually in contact, not with artificial, but with high imaginative and passionate work, and also with a noble Naturalism, as far as Naturalism was concerned with human nature—a Naturalism freer, bolder, more universal, but less temperate than the Greek, a Naturalism which was always passing into Romanticism. And this continual contact with imagination and passion set him largely free from the power of the artificial school, and enabled him to push forward the new life in poetry. When we read his "Ode on the Progress of Poesy"—one of his fine things—we see how truly he tried to drink of these ancient springs, how fully he was conscious of the continuity of English poetry.

Nevertheless, and this is a third matter, he was held back, by his nearness to the artificial and prosaic poetry

of Dryden and Pope, from getting all out of these springs that he might otherwise have got. Neither imagination nor passion had its perfect work in him. His natural description, his criticism of life, his contemplative spirit, his melancholy, were, in his poetry, modified away from the natural expression of them, from imaginative simplicity, by the conventional school in which he had been educated. Again and again the commonplace and meaningless diction of the period spoils, or seems to spoil, the grace of his verse. Its sentiment is sometimes faded; its sententious phrasing too usual, too sententious; its expression too carefully, too academically wrought—and passion, save in his contemplative melancholy, and even in that too obviously elaborated, is altogether wanting. Nevertheless, he almost escaped from these prosaic elements. He made a great step forward. And, so far as his backward motion as a poet is concerned, I impute his nearness to full escape from mere conventions in poetry to the fact that the man he most admired, followed and studied was not Pope, but the more masculine and forceful Dryden. Gray, even though he was a somewhat sentimental moralist, a retired contemplator of man from the shades of a university, had force, when he pleased to use it, in his poetry. Yet his plain connexion with a prosaic, non-natural age, even when he was chiefly connected with the enormous power of Dryden's giant genius, prevented him from using to their full strength the new poetic elements of his time and of his own nature.

Fourthly, he was not only a Naturalist in his study of man and the natural world, he was partly a Romantic, and pushed into a higher life the romantic elements

in the transition. The first element of this Romanticism, first in point of time—its sentimental, personal melancholy—was his; and the thought-weighted, scholarly, careful representation of this element gave it, not only a stronger foundation in the spirit of the time than it had as yet possessed, but also a greater finish and art in its expression. It became more distinctly a subject for poetry; and it kept for a long time Gray's moral and philosophic touch. But this was not all he did for Romanticism. He recalled to English poetry the rude, ancient, history-crowded stories, the legends and wonders of the bardic tales of the early Britons, of mediæval Wales, and of the Norse mythology. He opened out that new world of Romance, though only in short translations. He welcomed the Percy Reliques, the Celtic bric-à-brac of Macpherson's Ossian; and pitied, though he exposed, the romantic forgeries of Chatterton. Moreover, those rude romantic tales of Wales chimed in with his love of rude and savage scenery, in which he delighted to wander alone in picturesque thought. In all this he initiated a new romantic impulse, or at least gave the impulse a practical poetic form.

Fifthly, his work on Nature was not as unmixed as Thomson's nor as poetically felt as Collins'. Nature, in his poems, is always a background for humanity. It is the "most graceful ornament of poetry, but not its subject"—so he said. The youth who walks through the "Elegy in the Country Churchyard" loves the dewy morning, the rising sun, the beech at whose roots the babbling brook runs by, the glimmering stillness of the evening; but he loves them not wholly for their own sake. He loves them most because they echo the

note of his imagination, contemplating the life of man. Nature, when it sympathises with his mood, is taken up into the art of Gray. In the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," the scenery recalls his youth. The fields and winds of Thames, and the hills that look on the river, bestow on him a momentary bliss and breathe into his tired manhood the gladness of his early spring. But he leaves them at once to mourn over the gloom which slowly gathers round manhood and age. The mourning is faded—so is the verse.

It is commonplace to say:

> Since sorrow never comes too late,
> And happiness too quickly flies.

And this commonplace note is one too frequently found in Gray.

At other times, he moralises Nature; as in the Ode "On the Spring." He paints the insect-youth at noontide; busy, eager, floating in the liquid light:

> Some lightly o'er the current skim,
> Some show their gaily-gilded trim
> Quick-glancing in the sun.
>
> . . . .
>
> To contemplation's sober eye
> Such is the race of man.

Yet he really loved Nature. She brought to him thought, feeling, poetry and religion. And he was one of the first who made her a constant study, who sought her in her wildness, who travelled far and wide to find her solitudes. His letters are full of careful and carefully composed descriptions, not so much of the cultivated and quiet landscape he loved in the "Elegy" and the "Odes," as of the mountains, moors, dells and

gorges, torrents and streams of the Lake Country, of the Welsh solitudes, of the Scottish hills. In these, though he did not sing of them, he found an impulse of his song, and thence he took a deep impression into his quiet and sane religion. When he climbed the Gorge of the Grand Chartreuse, he felt the spirit of the place, "pregnant," he said, "with poetry and religion"; and it illustrates how far in front of France this English movement towards the sentiment of wild and solitary Nature was—that a modern French critic declares that the phrase could not have been written by any Frenchman of the time either in prose or verse. Here and there, in his poetry, this natural feeling for Nature (unhumanised, unmoralised) appears, but these instances are few and far between. Nor do they ever continue. They run up at once into some comparison with, some reflection on, human life. Moreover, they want that touch of simplicity, of natural joy, which Collins had. They are overwrought by art into a want of nature. The feeling in them is worn down by academic polishing. The art is more than the imagination; and as to the conception of a life, a spirit in Nature, on the edge of which he sometimes seems to tremble, and which would at once have uplifted his verse into a higher region, it is never really reached. The artificial age still stretched its dead hand over his work on Nature. It held him back from doing all he might have done in this way; from expressing all he felt. Nevertheless he set forward the poetry of Nature. He redeemed it from the mere cataloguing of Thomson. He brought into it careful composition. He harmonised it, up to a certain point, with man. It never could again be quite neglected in poetry. He opened the way to

the addition to it of natural passion. That passion was at hand, and when it came, it was like the rising of the sun on the twilight landscape of Gray. He was a forerunner of it, but the true forerunner was Collins and not Gray.

There is one more thing to say of Gray as the poet of this transition time. I have dwelt on the rising tendency towards an interest in man as man, beyond the life of cities, beyond the cultivated cliques of society; interest in nations beyond England, interest in human life in the country, where it was close to Nature—in the farmer, the peasant and the poor. Gray, in spite of his wide knowledge, of his intellectual society, of his academic remoteness from the world, was touched by that growing tendency and expressed it in the poem by which he chiefly lives; which itself will always be dear to England and justly dear; the "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard." Dryden or Pope would have been for ever incapable of writing a line of it, not from want of genius, but from want of the spirit and feeling which inspires it, from want of sympathy with its subject, its view of Nature or of man. We cannot fancy Pope writing of the ploughman driving his weary oxen home, of the rude forefathers of the hamlet, of the labourer's wife and children,—of the harvesters and the woodmen in the joy of their toil, of their homely joys and destiny obscure, of the short and simple annals of the poor. And Gray writes of them, with careful art it is true, but with real sympathy. Even the somewhat exalted strain with which he treats the rustic dead, and fancies that

> Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
> Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire—

some soul like Hampden, Milton or Cromwell, is redeemed from its fancifulness by the innate sincerity and grace of lines like these :

> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
> Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
> Along the cool sequestered vale of life
> They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Even the youth who is the personage of the poem, who meditates upon the country and the poor, has nought to do with the citied society of Dryden and Pope. He is one they would have passed by—one to fortune and to fame unknown, of wayward fancies, woeful, wan, forlorn, or crazed with care, or crossed with hopeless love—one of that wide class of solitary, sorrowful folk among the common classes of the earth, of whom the poetry of society took no notice, but whom Wordsworth chose as his friends, and the constant subject of his song.

For this advance in human sympathy—this more universal treatment of humanity—the world was now beginning to be ready. None of Gray's poems received so much acceptance from his contemporaries as this Elegy which praised the country and the poor with a poet's sympathy. And the tendency it recorded grew day by day in the heart of the public, till it built itself into the palace of Wordsworth's song. Gray did this for it. He laid its artistic foundation.

CHAPTER IV

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE POETS WHO PRECEDED IT

IT is quite necessary, at the date at which this study has arrived, to say something concerning that world-shaking movement which men call the Revolution, and which, in 1789, passed in France from floating thought into form and act. For its ideas, or opposition to its ideas, underlie the whole of the great poetry of England from Cowper to Keats—and in other forms, made, indeed, by its own working in the world, from Tennyson to Morris. We are now struggling to reshape them into a new poetry, but, as yet, with no clearness, no success.

Some say that the Revolution had but little influence on poetry; that its influence has been exaggerated. These persons do not seem to me to have grasped the ideas of the Revolution, nor studied its outbreak in France, and its temporary failure there; and without some steady study of the whole subject of the Revolution in France, the matter, the stuff and the passion which underlie and thrill like life through the poetry of the nineteenth century cannot be felt or understood. Even the minor poetry of the third-rate poets needs, for its useful and just reading, such a study. Nor, without it, is there any right appreciation possible of those poets, who, like Scott, were in revolt against the ideas of the Revolution. The ideas of the Revolution set a war on

foot. They came not to bring peace but a sword. And the work, in poetry, of its opponents, as well as of its supporters, needs for its comprehension knowledge of the thoughts and passions which were then at issue. For such a study the best books that can be read on the matter are De Tocqueville's "Ancien Régime" and Taine's "Origins."

The French Revolution, in its suddenness, violence and devastating power, and subsidence, may well be compared to the eruption of a volcano. But the comparison extends further than these analogies of suddenness, violence and the rest. A volcanic eruption is only sudden in its outburst. The forces which take violent shape in it have been gathering together in silence for many years. Age after age, the caverns below are slowly filling with tense elements seeking, for their escape, the path of least resistance. At last they reach the point where their upward thrust exactly equals the downward pressure of the earth and air. One touch then, the lightening by the hundredth part of an inch on the barometer of the weight of the atmosphere, and the imprisoned forces burst upwards to terrify and destroy the land. It seems then sudden, but it has been long preparing. Its point, its place of outbreak seems casual, but it has also been the result of a long-continued series of antecedents and sequences. It is fixed where previous events have produced the line of least resistance.

The ideas of the Revolution had been storing up their forces for at least two centuries under the surface of European society. They were ideas which were the contradiction and the destruction of the remains of the Feudal System. They were certain to break forth, and they found the path of least resistance in France.

There, the Feudal System was weakest; there the people had had more liberty than elsewhere on the Continent, and there the ideas themselves had been most thrown into stimulating theories. A host of literary men sowed France, country and town, with thousands and thousands of books and pamphlets which put into every conceivable shape the ideas of the Revolution in opposition to the ideas of the Ancient Regime. The path of least resistance was there, and there the volcano broke forth. It burst, it blazed amain and the whole face of the world was changed. In England no such overwhelming outbreak took place. The ideas of the Revolution were, of course, moving in England as they were in Germany. In Germany they were crushed; in England they stole from thought to thought into the minds of men. There was no fixed point in the political history of the country where preparation ceased and fierce formation began—no two periods divisible from one another. But what did not exist in politics did exist in poetry and among the poets. The English poets felt the revolutionary ideas long before 1789 and expressed them with growing passion; but they did not take a clear form in their poetry. They floated through it like those airs of the coming spring which haunt the milder days of February and March, prophecies of the resurrection of the world. They rose into clear life and form after 1789. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey embodied them. Then they decayed after Walter Scott had represented the reaction against them; and they decayed in the hands of the very men who had expressed their youth. Out of their decay they sprang up again in Byron and Shelley; and then they died altogether for a time in Keats.

Of course, English poetry up to 1832, the period of Parliamentary Reform, was much more than a mere representative of these ideas. It took up a thousand other subjects of emotion, but the revolutionary conceptions concerning man, his origin, his rights, mutual duties and destiny, are the underlying spirit of all poetry, the main emotion in which all other emotions share. So far, then, as English poetry from 1780 to 1832 is related to the general history of mankind, a great part—a necessary part—of its history is best explained by its relation to the Revolution and to the form the Revolution took in France. It can best be grouped around this centre, and its sequence is thus best explained. I assert this, but I do not dwell upon it. It would be too historical; and our business here is not history, but poetry, not the frame, but the picture in the frame. Nor shall we dwell on the political or social forms in which the Revolution enshrined its movement, but the main idea of the Revolution, expressed in its most concise form, we must dwell upon. It dominates poetry. And there are also certain side issues of this main idea which, carrying with them worlds of emotion, are worth marking out, not only because they are represented in English poetry for at least thirty years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, but also because they have continued to be powers in poetry up to the present day.

The first, the main idea of the Revolution, an idea which had been growing up, for at least 200 years before 1789, was "That there was only one Man, if we may so style it, in all Humanity; that, therefore all divisions, classes, outside differences, such as are made by birth, by rank, by wealth, by power, or by

separate nationalities, were to be wholly put aside as non-existent; that there was a universal Mankind, every member of which ought to be free, with equal opportunities, and bound each to each as brothers are bound. Hence, finally, all divisions made by caste, by colour, by climate, by aggressive patriotism, by all that we call nationality, were also dissolved. There was only one country, the country of Mankind, only one nation, the nation of Humanity."

This was the great conception which attacked the ideas of the Feudal System, and which will finally conquer the whole world. The war it initiated continues still. Even now, caste, rank, colour and wealth contend with it, and strive to hold their own against it, but day by day their armies of darkness or of oppression are being beaten back. The victory of this conception may be long in winning, but it is absolutely certain. The whole future of the race depends on that victory. The health, the honour, the greatness and great-doing of every nation depend on its obedience to the duties this conception imposes on it. Every disobedience to its duties entails—in proportion to the amount of the disobedience—national disgrace, dishonour, loss of influence for good, social disturbance and misery and sorrow and suffering on all mankind. That is as certain as any law of Nature. The sanctions of the idea are imperative and as inevitable as Death and Life. France proclaimed their conception in 1789 as a national confession. It violated it as the Terror went on; it violated it still more under the imperialism of Napoleon. It violated it again after Waterloo, returning like a dog to the vomit of Feudalism. It violated it still more, and in the meanest of all fashions, in the predominance

of wealth, under Napoleon III. There is scarcely any form of its violation which France did not present as an object-lesson to the world; and to this day, even under republican institutions, it is suffering the results of these persistent violations of the conceptions it was the first publicly to proclaim. No States can say they have not been warned. No government aware of the history of France can say that it has been taken by surprise when the consequences of its disobedience to the first law of human progress fall upon itself and the people that it rules. We must dwell on this for a moment. France proclaimed the idea and smote it into form. Alas, it also exhibited, one after another, nearly all the false forms the idea could take. It also exhibited its resurrections. Again and again, in revolution after revolution, it strove to recall the original conception. Again and again, it let it go, or let it drift into baser shapes. But it never let it completely go. It rescued it even when it seemed quite lost, by the voice of its writers, by the uprising of the passion of its people. It has showed to the world, during a hundred years, how and why the idea fails, and where, how and why it succeeds, where it is pure and where it is debased. France has been sacrificed for the good and use of the human race. This is an exhibition in history which has educated humanity, and the deep gratitude which is due to her for this, both when it was conscious and unconscious, has been given to her in a measure pitiably small.

It was this great conception, with all the vast ocean of emotion which flows after it, which in 1730 began to influence the poets of England, and which moves through all great poetry and prophecy now in majestic

power and kindling passion. For a century and a half it has mastered song.

It began, as I have said, with James Thomson. When he was alive the only class the poets thought of was the cultivated class in London. Pope said that the proper study of mankind was man, but he meant by man the little aristocracy of culture by which he was surrounded; and I am inclined to believe that this aristocracy is the most exclusive and the most heartless, and therefore the least original and originating of all the aristocracies. At any rate, it is diametrically opposed to the great conception of the Revolution, and the result was that the poetry of Dryden, of Pope, of the whole of the critical and intellectual school, had no elements of continued life in it and died with the death of its finest exponent. While he was yet alive, Thomson threw himself on the other side; not, I think, with any consciousness of what he was doing, not with any fervour, but sufficiently to show that a new spirit had entered into English poetry; that the Elizabethan passion for man as man had recurred, with a plainer direction given to it. The humanity we meet in the "Seasons" ranges from Greenland to Italy and seems as interested in the Esquimaux as in the Englishman. It is not the learned folk whom Thomson cares for, but the shepherd in the snow, the ploughman in the fields, the poor girl crouching in the doorway on a bitter night and the country-maiden bathing in the summer stream. A new world opens before us. It is the spirit of the Revolution before the Revolution. Such a spirit could not die away. It had immortal youth and fire; and poet after poet was influenced by it. It even shows itself in Samuel Johnson, whose

"London" cannot quite rest in London. It made the first great country novel in the hands of Goldsmith. In "The Traveller" Goldsmith passes from clime to clime beyond the English shores. In "Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain," he sketches the poor with faithfulness and sympathy. We feel that they are of the same blood, of the same honourable passions, as the rich and powerful. Man is man in his poetry, independent of all differences. Nevertheless, it does not seem quite natural; the principle is rather worn as a fashion than felt from the heart. And this is still more the case with Gray, whose "rude forefathers of the hamlet," whose "mute inglorious Milton," whose "short and simple annals of the poor" are not much more than the play of a cultivated scholar with an idea beginning to be in vogue. But when we come to Crabbe, whose "Village" was published in 1784, on the eve of the French Revolution, we come to the conception on the eve, as it were, of its birth. The poor, their life, their one human nature with the rich: that is the very subject itself of the book. It is painted with stern feeling and with a grim intensity of sympathy. The poetry of the city is replaced by the poetry of a sordid village on the east coast of England with all its poverty and crime; and its rare and humble goodness and comfort. The poetry of fine society, court and palace is replaced by the poetry of the alehouse, the rude gatherings of the brutish fishermen and the miseries of the workhouse. The painting is direct from Nature; and the only part of the poem which is out of tune is at the end where he passes into a panegyric on the Lord of the Manor and his son; and that has at least this advantage that it throws, by its contrast with the

previous wretchedness, a more lurid light upon it. In Cowper's "Task," published in 1785, it is not only the poor, but man as man, which is his subject; man in his simplest elements, man not only in England, but over the whole world. The very next year, so swift and so exciting was this idea, Burns, himself a peasant, took up the whole conception and added to its passion, and especially that passion of love which, in its equalising and exalting power, lies more than all other passions at the root of the universal conception of humanity. In a multitude of poems we hear breathing in 1786, three years before it burst into fierce form in France, the impassionating, the primary idea of the Revolution.

This, then, is the main idea and this its progress. But it contained within it a number of related ideas; some of which were fitted for poetic treatment and received it. The first of these has been alluded to in what I have already said. It is the expansion of the love of country into the love of mankind, and especially the loss of the hating element in patriotism. Our highest country is mankind, and the interests of our own nation (our separate nation) are to be subordinated to the interests of the whole. There is a love greater than patriotism. It is the love of the great ideas on whose continued mastery depend the fortunes of the whole race. That this should arise in England, the most insular of all nations, is surely remarkable, but so strong was the leaven now, that before France proclaimed it in '89, England proclaimed it by the voice of Cowper. It was the first time that note was struck in England, and there was no response to it, save on the lips of a few politicians and philosophers, over the

country. But this retired clerk boldly smote it out on the chords of his lyre. He transferred the inalienable brotherhood of man from England to Greenland, to Italy, to France, to Spain, to Africa, to South America, to the revolted States of America, and beyond them to the savage and the slave. His love of man was international.

This is a note which has gone on sounding in English poetry from that time. Wordsworth and Coleridge at the beginning of their career sympathised with France and denounced England for the crime of war against the young Republic. When they attacked Napoleon, they attacked him, not because he was at war with England, but because he strove to enslave the other nations to France; because he was at war with the principle that the love of man was a higher love than the love of country. Byron repudiated the insularity of England and died for another country than his own. Shelley was no isolated patriot; he loved Italy more than England; he loved mankind more than Italy. Keats was of no nation whatever, but the nation of loveliness. Tennyson reverted to the merely patriotic feeling, which contains a contempt of, or an attack on, other countries than our own; but Browning maintained, in a poetry which is Italian, French, Spanish more than English, the wider and nobler patriotism which loves man as man, independent of all national distinctions. That idea lasts. Wherever it lives in poetry, it keeps it young and fresh. Wherever it breathes, it also burns. Its fire is holier, its aspect is more bright, its song more thrilling than any insular or limited love of nationality; and its mightiest and noblest development is in the future. When it is fully

grasped in action, as it is now by some of us in conception, poetry will receive its highest impulse and accomplish its most splendid and passionate song. May God be with it, and the crowning race of Man!

The second corollary from the original idea which took form in poetry was a protest for liberty and against oppression. We need not dwell on that, because it was not special to the Revolution. It has always been natural to mankind, and it has always formed one of the great motives of poetry. What region of the earth is not full of its song? Nevertheless, it took at this time in English poetry a more plain and practical turn than it had taken before; and it was new in its denunciations, in its appeal to God, in its foundation on the universal brotherhood of man, when Cowper took it up and gave it voice. He carried the poetry of human wrong into the prison with Howard and into the starving lives of the poor. He denounced, as Goldsmith had already done, the landowners who neglected their peasants and the merchants who built factories with blood, and the infamy of slavery. Patience itself, he said, is meanness in a slave. The English king, he thought and said, who covets more than freemen choose to grant, is a traitor, and rebellion is a duty. He had an example of that close at hand in the revolt of the American Colonies. I have often wondered whether Cowper in those famous lines was not thinking of those more famous days when Adams cried, as he heard the musketry at dawn from the fields near Woburn—"O, what a glorious morning is this!" "The Task" was published in 1785. He may have written these very verses shortly after the news of Lexington arrived in England in 1775. At any rate, he felt the wrath of the

coming Revolution in France, four years before it came, when he suddenly places us in front of the Bastille :

> Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts,
> Ye dungeons and ye caverns of despair,
> That monarchs have supplied from age to age
> With music such as suits their sovereign ears—
> The sighs and groans of miserable men !
> There's not an English heart that would not leap
> To hear that ye are fallen at last.

Wordsworth heard the news ; Coleridge heard it ; and both recorded their triumphant joy. From that day, poetry, which had always used this motive of love of liberty and hate of oppression, gave it a more practical turn. The right, so long considered divine, of the powerful, the well-born and the wealthy to use up the poor to support this right, was considered the vilest wrong ; and wherever it was used, that special use was plainly named and directly attacked by the poets. This was the change that took place, and English-speaking poetry has done this close, defensive work, not negligently.

The third idea contained in the original conception, I have already dwelt on in its origins in England. It has been called " The Return to Nature." It is no harm in this introductory essay to isolate it again in different words before we treat of the poets who fully shaped it into song. It held that the true happiness of man consisted in a simple, almost a primæval life in accordance with Nature. This is an idea which was not peculiar to the Revolution. It has always arisen when luxury has corrupted society ; when great wealth in a few hands has made it stupid ; when life

is made complex by selfish interests; when it is burdened with conventions and weary of knowledge. Let us get back, it says, to the breast of Mother Earth, where our own hands can win our own living from the woods and fields, when man is free from the slaveries of civilisation; away from the cities in which men lose their individuality and live like worms wriggling in a dish; away from the torment of intelligence and the uselessness of culture. And this included, of course, a belief that the natural man, man in his simplest form, and living the simplest life, was the best sort of man. In the peasant, the labourer, among shepherds and woodmen, the natural affections were most naturally felt, the primary emotions most free and noble, the virtues most manly, the heroism of life most noble. This was the idea; not new, but newly shaped. It may be said, at this time, to have first arisen in England, but it was Rousseau who gave it full vogue. He was himself inspired by it, and he inspired others with his passion. He put it into so attractive a form that men were convinced of it as it were against their will, and even the society of the Court and the noblesse took it up and played with it; fools, who did not understand that it held in it fire, earthquake and hurricane for their society. In England, it helped to destroy the school of Pope, which was eminently a school of citied culture. It dawned in the poetry of Thomson; it even influenced in his scholastic retirement the precise and careful verse of Gray. It moved through all the minor poets. Poetry left the city and took a country house. At first an air of unreality pervaded this poetry. The poetry called artificial left a kind of ghost behind it; and the ghost was sententious. The poets played with

the new idea, but they were not passionate for it. However, as the French form of the Revolution drew near, the air grew warmer; this idea began to be a real power; and it was to be put into a form more luminous and more glowing. Goldsmith, Crabbe and Cowper developed it. It rose into passion in Burns. And when the French Revolution broke out, it became one of the vital spirits of English poetry. The poets themselves lived its life. Wordsworth fled the cities, dwelt in Somersetshire and finally settled in a remote village among the Cumberland mountains. He read few books; he let his own nature elicit its own poetry. He worked for his own living, and no one has ever clung closer than he to the heart of the common earth. Coleridge, when he was young, lived the same kind of life—Southey aspired to do so. They returned to Nature, and they made of natural things their dearest subjects. Moreover, they made the natural man, and his natural life, their main humanity. Wordsworth's new theory of poetry was based on the belief that in the natural phraseology of men educated by Nature and living a natural life, such as a shepherd lived in the dales, was to be found the true language of poetry. It was an absurd proposition and he sometimes carried it into a most absurd extreme, but it illustrates the passionate obstinacy with which this idea of the return to Nature was supported and the mastery it exercised over the minds of men. And the heroes of this new poetry were not warriors, princes, philosophers or great adventurers, but the shepherds of the hills and the ploughman at work, and the wives of the peasants and the children of the poor. It was a vast revolution, and its power has endured in poetry for more than a

century. It ran, of course, into its extreme, but the extreme, in the end, did not hinder, but confirmed, its good. And its greatest good was the immense expansion which it gave to poetry. It opened out to the work of song not only the whole of country life, but also the emotional life of the largest and the most varied class in humanity, the class of the poor. Henceforth the range of poetry was as wide as human nature itself.

Connected with this was another subject of feeling and thought which also brought a new life into poetry. The transference which has just been described of the interests of the poets from man, considered as an intellectual and wealthy class in cities, to man independent of culture and wealth, as he was found in the country in his simplest elements—brought about, in time, or ran alongside of, a love of wild natural scenery. As the best of man was to be found where he was least spoiled by cultivation, so the greatest beauty was to be found, not in the trim gardens and landscape that Pope loved, but in the wild, untutored lands which man had not touched, where Nature went her own original way, and where, in consequence, we might get closer to her heart.

This is also a result of the Revolution ideas concerning man. Rousseau, who gave this love of wild Nature its most natural, one may say, its finest voice in France before the Revolution, connects it with the new interest in man, as seen in his simplest life. This love of wild Nature and the expression of it developed *pari passu* with the thought of man being at his best in the state of nature, and was kept hand in hand with the passion of humanity. We must always remember

that the same poets who lived with the uncultivated people and found in them the most beautiful and unspoilt forms of human nature, found in the least cultivated natural scenery, in scenery wholly untouched by any hand but God's, the loveliest, the most spiritual natural beauty. Into that, as into an ocean of beauty, they plunged with passion, and some of them, especially modern poets, with so extreme and isolated a joy that they forgot in it their love of pure human nature—that is, forgot the origin of their love of wild Nature. But that was not the case at the beginning of the last century. Man was not then neglected. But the love of Nature, though it did not at that time extinguish the love of man, expanded—and especially after 1789, with the same rapidity and the same copiousness as the love of man as man expanded. This, at least, was the case in England.

The curious thing is that the idea thus struck into a finished form by Rousseau, had, for a long time, no growth in France as compared with its growth in England. The fact is that the tremendous rush of the new theories about man into violent political action in France overwhelmed at first this related idea. It took thirty years at least, after the Revolution was over, for the French poets fully to develop that solitary love of wild Nature which rose like a tree into full foliage in England ten years after the Revolution, which had begun to grow in England sixty years before its outburst, and which has continued to extend its branches —a mightier and a mightier tree—up to the present time. This then is a part of the revolutionary movement which especially belongs to England, and we owe its steady and vast expansion to our having kept the main

idea of the Revolution in the midst of peace, apart from hasty, violent action, apart from despotism.

We have studied in outline the development of this poetry of wild Nature from James Thomson, through Gray and Collins. We can trace it also in Goldsmith, Chatterton, Beattie, and in the faded verse of the Wartons. Then, as the outbreak of the Revolution drew near, this new poetry grew stronger and lovelier than before. Above all it grew more natural, closer to the actual sights and sounds of Nature, closer to the life of animals. The poets described what they saw, and lived with their eye on the subjects. This was the case with Cowper, Crabbe and Burns. But in these three poets, Nature is very rarely loved or haunted only for her own sake. Man is always with her. She is still, but with ever-advancing power, only a background for human nature. The poet is not lost in her alone. Neither Cowper, Crabbe nor Burns are capable of Wordsworth's isolation with the souls of lonely places, of temporary forgetfulness of man in Nature. It was not till the mighty, soul-shaking, past-destroying movement of the Revolution was thrown into passionate form in France that the English poets, set on fire by that flaming outburst, which burnt up every remnant of past conventions and artificial thought and made man naked of all that hampered his original emotions, became capable, when they chose, of forgetting man, of forgetting their very self, in the love of the Mighty Being, with whose spirit, in the wild and lonely places of the earth, they seemed to mingle, in whose doings they delighted, and whose very personality they loved, as a form of God Himself.

It seems strange to say that a movement for man

should produce a passion for Nature in which man was at times forgotten. But it must be remembered that man was never really left aside by these poets. Nature came to be felt in this intense way through the intenser interest that they took in the humanity they found living among the wild mountains and the lonely streams. Wordsworth sketches in the "Prelude" the whole of the process. And, moreover, the fire of emotion they felt for man was so glowing that, when they came to look at Nature, they transferred the fire to their contemplation of Nature. Her beauty was now loved by the new poets, after the Revolution, as much as humanity was loved; and immediately all the poetry of Nature was transfigured into a new life. This was a wondrous change. It took fifty years to accomplish, but when it was accomplished, when in 1798 Wordsworth revealed to us, especially in that poem on the Wye, the passion of his soul for Nature, the life he felt in her, and the answer of his own being to the great Being of thought and beauty in the world—the poetry of Nature was utterly revolutionised. It was like the discovery of a new and lovely continent, opened for the first time to the eager voyaging of all the poets who should come after him. When we read those verses we feel that nothing resembling them in spirit, in emotion, in thought, had ever been written before.

Another idea which was adopted into poetry at this time, was also the direct outcome of the revolutionary thought. This was the vision and the prophecy of a universal regeneration of mankind, of a golden age, not mournfully looked back on as passed away, but joyfully anticipated in the future. It had existed long ago in the faith of the Church in a millennium, but there

it was limited to the saved, who were then a small number; and it was to be realised after a great upturning of the earth for judgment. It was supernatural, not natural. It occurs even in the classical poets; it occurs now and again in the poets of England of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it occurs vaguely, and it is always limited to a class or a nation for want of a universal conception of man. But now, when man was conceived of as one people, as having one country of which all, without exception, were citizens, as being a universal brotherhood—and when, under the rule of that conception, all exclusive systems, whether poetical or religious, fell under the ban of humanity—then indeed, for the first time, the idea of an all-embracing restitution of mankind into a perfected state became possible. We find it first in Cowper, but somewhat limited by his theology. But when his poetic passion was upon him, he rose above his theology. He sees the time when love shall be master of all men, evil be annihilated, all climes have an eternal summer, and God be wholly at home with men. Coleridge and Wordsworth took up the same thought and sang of it in connexion with the outbreak of the Revolution. They ceased to sing of it when France smote freedom down by the hand of Napoleon. And then there was silence with regard to it for a time. But the silence did not last long. This universal thought took its highest form in the "Prometheus Unbound" of Shelley, the fourth act of which is the choral song of the whole universe for the regeneration of all mankind in Love and Peace and Joy. Nor has that conception ever died. It has formed, since Shelley's time, with a few sorrowful exceptions, one of the noblest motives of the English

poets. The hopes of man had always put it forth, but it never could take a universal form as long as, under despotic kings, or feudal systems of any kind, all men were not considered equally worthy of love and justice. Christianity had always put it forth, but it never could take a universal form as long as priests, for the sake of retaining power, made its happiness belong only to a few rescued with difficulty from the sinful world. These limits to it lasted even through Wordsworth and Coleridge, so long does the exclusive take to die. But Shelley, flinging boldly overboard, and with fiery wrath, all the limitations made by political and religious systems, leaped straight to the heart of this great thought, derived from the original idea of Christianity and of the Revolution, and proclaimed the right of all mankind to completion and perfection. The whole world shall be redeemed. All men shall yet be equal, free and brothers in a Golden Age. It is the habit nowadays to smile at this, but if you deprive the world of that faith and its hope, you leave it to degradation. Let the poets keep it up. They can do no better work.

Then, in conclusion, when men were thus being set free, even before 1789, by the influence of world-wide ideas concerning man, from the oppressive and limiting powers of caste; when, in the air of this freedom, literature and art ceased to be the business of a few and became the possibility of all, a great development of individuality took place—and that to such a degree that, in poetry at least, men of the lower classes, and men who lived apart from the cultured caste in cities, were the chief speakers. The ideas of the Revolution kindled intellect and passion wherever they fell. Wealth, culture, rank, these did not count.

A man is a man for all that. It is his right, his duty, to say what is in him; and if what he has to say is good or beautiful, he is above kings who are dull and rich men who may not love their fellows. Of course, such a belief, and the sentiment of it, awoke in all classes every latent germ of intelligence, imagination and emotion, and the whole field of literary and artistic work was as much enlarged as the field of social, political and warlike work. Men pushed everywhere to the surface like corn in spring, and the greater number were outside of the conventional society. We may recall that the chief leaders of the Revolution in France and of the Napoleon wars sprang from the common people. And the chief poets who sent forth the ideas, with all their emancipating and impassionating emotions which have been discussed in this chapter, were Cowper, a retired lawyer's clerk who lived away from towns in a lazy land, by a slow-moving stream, and Burns, a veritable peasant of the Lowlands, who

> in his glory and his joy
> Followed the plough along the mountain side.

And when the Revolution did break forth, it was not the critics and the comfortable folk of social intelligence who then opened the new fountain of song, but Coleridge, who was always on the verge of bankruptcy, and Wordsworth, who, educated among peasants, lived their life and, scraping through Cambridge, settled down with his sister to live in a silent country, in a tiny cottage, on £80 a year; and William Blake, the most curious example of the unrelated individualities which emerged at this time to astonish, irritate and impel the world. Blake's first poems preceded the French Revolu-

tion. The "Songs of Innocence" appeared in 1789, the year of its outburst. The "Songs of Experience" were engraved in 1794, when the Terror was dying. His poetic work, such as it was, continued while Wordsworth and Coleridge were writing. He, Cowper, Crabbe and Burns lived through that great uprising, and into the reaction against it. But he remained, while the rest fell away, its faithful follower. None of them were as poor as he was, none of them so unknown, none of them, save Wordsworth, so original, so plain an example of the remarkable individuality which arose out of the people in this creative and stormy time. None of them, though he dwelt in London, lived more close to Nature, more according to Nature, even to the violation of the maxims of society. He represented, better than the others, in his life and work the revolt from all conventional opinions, whether in art, literature, religion or social matters, which characterised the Revolution. He claimed his right to live as he pleased for the sake of man. He represented, briefly, often obscurely, but most determinedly, all the ideas we have dwelt on in this chapter—and one more on which we have not dwelt, for it did not, except in his case, arise at this time in England—an attack on priests, and on all religious doctrines which enslaved the conscience, weakened the reason, violated the love or limited the imagination of mankind.

I have thus sketched the poetic state of England before 1789. It was a state in which vague, prophetic ideas were flying about from mind to mind, ideas half-conceived, ideas that waited some outward touch to leap into as clear life as Athena from the head of Zeus. They had grown clearer and clearer among the poets

as the poems they wrote grew closer to 1789. But they waited the event which should strike them into a shape which all the world could understand.

That event came when the noise of the fall of the Bastille rang through Europe. It was the tocsin of a new poetry which began in Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads" of 1798. But before we come to Wordsworth, Cowper, Crabbe and Burns deserve a more extended notice; not as representing the ideas on which we have now been dwelling, but as poets. We shall next, therefore, deal with the poetry of the two first, and afterwards with the poetry of Burns.

CHAPTER V

CRABBE AND COWPER

It is a somewhat commonplace theory of mine that we cannot fully feel, even understand, the work of any poet till we have visited and assimilated the scenery in which he chiefly lived; from which he received impressions day by day, morning, noon and night. Each place has its own special sentiment, its soul as Wordsworth would call it; and this sentiment becomes part of the being of the poet; steals into the chambers of his imagination; and, having entered in, abides there for ever; touching all the furniture of his thought and passion with its peculiar perfume; and, even when he least knows it, passing like a spirit into his work. Not to know the scenery in which he lived, and especially when he was young or when he first became a poet; not to have felt the spirit of its distinctive sentiment, is to be deprived of one of the best means of becoming at one with his poetry.

I have walked among the ancient trees and by the lingering streams of the country where Shakespeare lived and in its sheep-fed meadows—a land with its own character; and my feeling and comprehension of his poetry were strangely increased, not only of such poetry as we find in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," "As You Like It" and "A Winter's Tale," but also of his poetry of human nature. The temperance, the

slow quiet of that midland scenery seemed to me, perhaps too fancifully, to have so wrought on Shakespeare as to have, throughout his fiercest tragedy, held him back from the turgid, immoderate, loose and overfantastical thought and style which marked the other dramatists of his time.

I might take Milton also for an example, with the dignified scenery of the Thames, and the splendour of Italy breathing in his verse, style and thought, but I pass on to Wordsworth. Somersetshire does not live much in his verse. It needs a long time for the special spirit of a place to become a vital element in a poet's verse, and Wordsworth soon left the combes of the Quantocks. But no one can justly feel the work of Wordsworth who has not himself drunk, till he is full, of the lovely distinctive spirit of the Lake Country. It has its own largeness in the solitudes of the high hills, its sublimity in the recessed mountains and silent tarns where the storms are brewed, its quietudes of peace where the lakes lie reflecting in their green calm the image of the meadows and the mountains; and these two spirits of sublime and quiet beauty live, pervasively, in Wordsworth's poetry, even when its subjects are apart from them. Above all, the scenery of Grasmere is full of tender little events, little impressions made by miniature scenes, a single flower at the root of a tree, a brown bird drinking from a pool, a group of juniper that throws a shadow on the moors, a solitary cry from a lost sheep, a thousand little events among the greatnesses of Nature. It is these tiny impulses, these little pictures, awaking feeling at every step, which form the subjects of half of Wordsworth's best poems. I never understood a great part of his

special charm till I saw and felt their presence and the power they had to stir the soul of imagination.

And Cowper—if we wish to feel the slow, winding quietudes of his verse, the temperate level of his thought, the absence of any violent or deep passion in it, its still and brooding note, the limited ranges of its emotion, its afternoon spirit, its gentleness, its subdued melancholy and subdued humour—we cannot enter fully into these qualities in his poetry nor feel the spirit in it, till we have visited the land where he lived so long, where he wrote the "Task" and made by it his poetic name. There, the hills are low, quiet uplifts from the plain, but, because of the flat country, commanding extensive views. The trees are large, full-foliaged, in avenues and scattered groves, filled with singing birds and woodland animals. One of the most charming of his poems—the music of whose verse echoes the murmur of the trees of which he writes, records his pleasure in these creatures of his land:

> The poplars are felled—farewell to the shade
> And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade.
> The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,
> Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.

Few are the storms of this still and gentle scenery, and the vast low arch of sky which broods above it ministers to contentment and peace, not to excitement or variety. And there is no river stiller than the Ouse—almost full to the edge of its low banks and whispering reeds, moving slowly but with silent swirls which speak of monotonous but continual life in its waters, gentle, unimpassioned, quiet even in flood, content to be with its own fields, its drooping willows, its feeding cattle

and its quiet sky. I never see it, but I think of the poetry of Cowper. It is the image of its spirit, it, and the country-sides that border it. Except in his personal poetry which stands alone, the peculiar sentiment of the Nature in which his happiest time was spent, pervades the bulk of his verse—even the verse which treats of social and political subjects.

A different scenery filled the eyes and heart of Crabbe when he was young. Its image followed him when he left it, and its spirit entered into his latest verse. "Cast by Fortune on a frowning coast," boasting no groves or happy valleys, he painted life with all the harshness, sternness and austereness of the scenery in which he lived. A low coast, repellent and rude, bordered a sullen, flint-grey sea, whose waves in heavy storms lashed up to the cabins of the lawless fishermen huddled in their dirty village. Behind the shore, the barren sands ran inland, thistle-grown, and where they were cultivated with despair, only producing ragged crops of rye. Within were fens and marshy moors where men laid up disease. The only excitement was the gale which drove the ship into the greedy hands of the wreckers of the coast. This stern, iron, sometimes horrible, always commonplace scenery, where the beauty of fruitfulness was not, sank deep into the poetry of Crabbe. Even when a gentler scenery enters into his verse, the harshness of the first impression modulates the softness into roughness; and the spirit of the poet is too often the spirit of the mist, the barren, thorny land, and the storm-tossed sea, the misery and the melancholy of it all.

No contrast can then be greater or more interesting than that between the spirit of the verse of Cowper and

that of Crabbe; and one of the elements that made the difference was the influence on each of them of the different aspects Nature presented to their eyes, impressed upon their souls.

Yet, what is true of their poetry was not true of their lives and characters. One would have thought that Cowper would have been at peace, and Crabbe a child of storm. But within, Cowper was tormented and Crabbe at peace. Cowper, the quietest of poets, the least harsh, the most gentle, born to be kind and heal the sorrows of men, who loved all innocent happy things, whose satire did not scarify but improve, was half his life insane, fierce against himself even to many attempts at suicide, torn with despair and misery—no quietude within. Only at intervals the hurricane in his heart was hushed. It is well to remember this when one reads his poetry, for even in the steadiest and most temperate verse this inward wretchedness often lifts its head. This was in a strange and dreadful contrast to the gentle life with the women and animals he loved, to the gentle natural scenery his heart admired.

Again, one would have thought from the rude subjects and the miserable tragedy Crabbe painted so well, and from the dreary natural scenery, the painful power of which sank into his verse, that Crabbe's life was unquiet, tormented by wild thinking and feeling, harsh, coarse and ill-treated by fortune. The very opposite was the case. Eminently sane, incapable, one would say, of any disquiet thought or emotion, as kind and gentle as Cowper in the action of his life, fortunate to a remarkable degree in his sudden rise into literary and good society and in his hosts of friends, passing from one comfortable rectory to another, and dying

in peace—the contrast between his work and his life was strange. He sat, as it were, apart from the passions and the tragedies he described. His inner life was no reflection of the stormy sea, the sullen skies, the barren land he pictured in his verse. He was as still within as Cowper was restless.

This is a curious piece of psychological history. It is as if the men wished to relieve or dramatise their inner lives by writing of that which stood over against the inner life of their souls. Crabbe, with somewhat monotonous peace within, writes of harsh miseries and storm-tossed lives and rough Nature. Cowper, with agony within, writes of gentle domestic peace, of softly flowing scenery, of the pleasant comedy of life. Till we think a little of these things, we shall not grasp the essential spirit of their poetry.

The first thing that strikes us when we read Crabbe and Cowper is the immense distance we have travelled from Pope and his school, from even Gray, Collins, and the rest. A certain remnant of Pope's influence remains in the satires of Cowper, and in the didactic and satirical parts of Crabbe's poetry. But the bulk of the poetry of both not only lies in a different world from that of Pope, but itself has created that world. And it seems divided by a great gulf from Pope, even from Young, Thomson, Gray—so great is the change. We are no longer in an artificial world, or a classical, ideal or romantic world, nor on the high levels of Parnassus where the Muses talk in swelling phrase. We live no longer among the aristocratic classes, or with cultured cliques of clever men, or with scholars like Gray. Poetry has left fine society. It is now poetry for that great middle class which was beginning to grow

into importance in England. A considerable part of them was interested in books, in poetry, in the life which went on around them in the villages. These new people had a real love of Nature; they lived nearly all their life in the country; town life was on the whole distressing to them or abhorrent. An Edinburgh Reviewer of that time calculates that if there were 2,000 of the upper classes who might care for the poetry of Cowper and Crabbe, there were among the "middling classes," as he calls them, 20,000 who would care for it. Poetry had thus extended its power over ten times the number of folk it touched by Pope or Gray, and into a different class. We may say indeed that its place, its production and its readers had been transferred from the town to the country. This was a vital alteration, and had far-reaching consequences, especially as these poets and their followers, with all the intolerance of a reaction, set themselves, with what must have seemed great impertinence, to abuse fine society, to paint the sins and follies of cities, to laugh at literary cliques, to condemn, even with some ferocity, the rich, to set over against the luxuries of wealth the miseries of the poor, and to denounce the contrast.

The change was even greater in this—that poetry now passed away completely from its ideal ranges, its lofty subjects, above all, from its artificial diction, down to the plains of reality. The subjects were no longer the Bard and the Progress of Poesy, or the stories of romance such as Gray and Macpherson had attempted. They were no longer Horatian epistles, or Essays on Man, or Night Thoughts, or the Castle of Indolence, or such faded sentiment as the Wartons indulged. Out of these realms of unreality poetry descended to mingle with,

to feel and to describe the real life of man, the every-day doings of Nature, the life which the magistrate and the parson saw in the villages of the Midlands and in the fishing hamlets of the East Coast. Poetry painted now, with Hogarthian minuteness by Crabbe, with gentle though distant sympathy by Cowper, the actual miseries, tragedies, wretchedness of the labourer and the peasant—nor did it omit the fierce work of the uncultivated, uncontrolled passions which ran their course in the neglected hamlets of England. Poetry got down to reality. That also was a mighty change, and its consequences in poetry were also far-reaching.

Crabbe, when he began to think, was himself one of the poorer folk, and knew their life. He was at first a warehouseman, and he was not inclined to mince matters, or to dwell on the pretty romance the romantic or philosophic poets wove around the poor, when day by day he was face to face with their miserable lot, and the crime that followed it. Let us read a piece out of the "Village," the poem by which in 1783 he first made his name. It is enough to show the new world into which Poetry had come, her determination to paint things as they really were. It paints the rustic labourer's fate:

> He once was chief in all the rustic trade;
> His steady hand the straightest furrow made;
> Full many a prize he won, and still is proud
> To find the triumphs of his youth allow'd;
> A transient pleasure sparkles in his eyes,
> He hears and smiles, then thinks again and sighs:
> For now he journeys to his grave in pain;
> The rich disdain him; nay the poor disdain:
> Alternate masters now their slave command,
> Urge the weak efforts of his feeble hand.

And, when his age attempts its task in vain,
With ruthless taunts, of lazy poor complain.
Oft may you see him, when he tends the sheep,
His winter charge, beneath the hillock weep;
Oft hear his murmur to the winds that blow
O'er his white locks and bury them in snow,
When roused by rage and muttering in the morn,
He mends the broken hedge with icy thorn:—
"Why do I live when I desire to be
At once from life and life's long labour free?
Like leaves in spring, the young are blown away
Without the sorrows of a slow decay;
I, like yon wither'd leaf, remain behind,
Nipt by the frost and shivering in the wind;
There it abides till younger buds come on
As I, now all my fellow-swains are gone;
Then from the rising generation thrust,
It falls, like me, unnoticed to the dust.
These fruitful fields, these numerous flocks I see,
Are others' gain, but killing cares to me;
To me the children of my youth are lords,
Cool in their looks, but hasty in their words;
Wants of their own demand their care; and who
Feels his own want and succours others too?
A lonely, wretched man, in pain I go,
None need my help, and none relieve my woe;
Then let my bones beneath the turf be laid,
And men forget the wretch they would not aid."

1807 saw the "Parish Register." The "Borough," a description in twenty-four letters of a sea-port, of Aldborough, saw the light in 1809. The manners, the lives, the crimes, the sorrows of even a lower class of persons than those detailed in the "Parish Register" are painted here with pity, but with unrelenting, almost repulsive accuracy. The "Tales" followed in 1812. They are of a different class. They delineate the fortunes of what our writers would call the lower middle

class—and with the same close observation and original thought. The inner life and passions, humour, misfortunes, woes and joys of this class are related with an astonishing variety of the commonplace, and with a full accompaniment of varied circumstance and detail which prove that Crabbe, if he did not possess the ethereal imagination of the higher poets, of Reason in her loftiest mood, yet did possess the creative imagination fitted to his subjects—a homespun imagination, good for wear, and by the force of its sight and insight able to drive home the realities of life. The figures stand out clear; their souls are just as clear. Their talk is homely, but it rings true; and sometimes it rises into a vigorous roughness of passion and eloquence of passion, which, were the tales more concise and better composed, would have lifted Crabbe into a higher poetic rank than he occupies. In one poem at least—in "Sir Eustace Grey," and indeed in the "Gipsy Woman," but chiefly in "Eustace Grey," he rises into a terror of tragedy, into a supernatural passion, such as belongs to that mystic realm of suggestive imagination in which so often Coleridge and Wordsworth made their home. But this is very rare; and the verse in which these poems are written is not that ten-syllabled narrative rhyming verse in which he usually composed. The passion forced a more lyrical metre.

The "Tales of the Hall" succeeded the "Tales" in 1819. These stories belong, as the title suggests, to a higher rank in life than that of the lower middle class. They are half grave, half gay, and the sunnier side of life is even more often shown in them than the darker. Even in the tragic stories a thread of brightness is inwoven. The subjects have less darkness, less

depth in the shadows. I ought perhaps to have spoken more of his humour, of his work on the lighter commonplace of life, of his accurate drawing of the well-fed farmer, the religious sexton, the Quaker coquette and a host of other half-comic characters, but his force is in tragedy and that comes uppermost.

He was now getting old, and in his comfortable home, he brooded less on the misfortunes of life. The scenery too has changed. The starved heath and the howling sea, the paupers and the criminals are gone, and we see a pleasant country village with honest, well-fared country folk, and near it an ancient Hall and well-ordered Church, comfortable farmers and homesteads, a country-side, fertile, well wooded, watered by happy streams, and not troubled by the roaring of the hungry sea. Many well-studied portraits are in the gallery of this book; many close descriptions, without any passionate sentiment in them, of Nature; many terse, wise and experienced remarks—"uncommon things said in so common a way as to escape notice." Certain tragic stories are as tragic as his earlier work. Terror and pity still fall easily from his hand, but it is pleasant to feel that comedy, and comedy in its grace and gentleness, is, as his years grew near to death, more loved in this book than in the others. At the same time, the power of the poetry has diminished. The hold on reality is less; the concise outline, the intensity, especially that of the moment, are somewhat blurred. He never was good in building his tales. They have all kinds of outbuildings added on to them. His form was never perfect, nor his diction. He did not care for Art enough to keep him from diffuseness, to enable him to reject the unnecessary, and these faults

are naturally more prominent in the "Tales of the Hall." An old man is either too concise, till he becomes bald; or too garrulous till he is too long—and Crabbe is in the second category. Yet the man is there, unlike any one else; the steadfast, uncompromising individuality. He had his own atmosphere, "his work world," as Tennyson said. And whoever, passing through the first indifference, even the first boredom which may beset him, takes the pains to read the best work of Crabbe, will receive at last so deep an impression of his imaginative reality, of his closeness to Nature, of his sincerity of thought, that he will say to himself —"If this work be not the work of genius, it is the work of a talent which is on the edge of genius."

William Cowper, noiseless and gentle as his life was, spent with a few friends apart from the world, will always keep his place in English poetry. He is a landmark in its history. From his work, as from a railway station, issued a number of new lines on which the engines of the new poetry ran to varied goals. We studied in the last chapter some of these, and I need not repeat them. They belonged to the ideas of the Revolution, and we shall get no clear view of nineteenth-century poetry, nor of the poetry which will emerge in the twentieth, when the present anarchy of poetry is overpast, until we grasp them with not only an historical and social apprehension, but with an impassioned thoughtfulness. The future of poetry is in these world-wide ideas, and in the new forms which they will take in philosophy, religion, science and society.

There were, however, other lines which Cowper started on their way. He began afresh, and in a new

way, the theological and religious poetry of England. His first published work was the "Olney Hymns," composed by him and his friend Newton. Many of them are not only religious, but poetical, and the melody of the best of them is almost perfect. The whole of his work is steeped in religion. But this religious poetry is also—and this is the new thing—built into a special theology, a theology so strong, fierce, uncompromising, and so cruel, that it is a wonder it did not slaughter in Cowper, as in a sacrifice, the maiden of Poetry. But Cowper gentled it, and Poetry survived. Ever since that time theology of some kind has entered, with a few exceptions, such as Keats, Scott and Morris, into the work of the greater English poets. What that theology was in Cowper, and the power it had over his work, I have elsewhere detailed.[1]

Another line of poetry which he initiated—and Burns along with him—was that which draws its impulse from the natural love of the more innocent animals, those charming companions of our humanity. This is a real affection and is combined with gratitude for their love, with pity for their voiceless trouble, and with an indignation, in which God shares, for the cruelty of man to them whether it be for the sake of sport or of knowledge.

It is called a sentimental indignation, and this is supposed to be blame. But the blame recoils on the blamer, and those who love animals take it as praise, and wear it as an honour. It is well that the poets have added strength to that natural sentiment of love of animals, and Cowper did it with a gentle grace, a vital sympathy which was all his own. His three hares, his

[1] "Theology in the English Poets."

spaniel, are added to the personages in English poetry. He humanised animals; he felt his kinship with them; he made them our teachers and our friends. He watched their ways with his tender smile, and he fills his landscape with their life. And Wordsworth, Coleridge, felt his spirit in this matter and followed his lead. Blake's love of animals was not accompanied by any insight into their life. It was more hatred of cruelty which moved him than love of animals. Burns used them as the vehicle of satire or pitiful thought on the fates of men. But Wordsworth and Coleridge followed the simpler and closer love which Cowper felt for beast and bird; the feeling of deep relationship with them; of their being a vital part of the universe which men were punished for injuring.

There was another line of poetry he began so forcibly that I claim him as its best originator—the treatment of the long-continued, common charities of domestic, daily life in simple, natural and pathetic verse—a poetry of love, but not of the passionate form of love between man and woman. Sorrow, in Cowper's case, entered profoundly into this love; and the poems he dedicated to it are perfect in their simplicity and pathos. When Wordsworth followed on the same line, and wrote of the prolonged emotion of the domestic charities, he wrote in happiness, as in his poem to his wife:

> She was a phantom of delight—

but the spirit which presided over that poem, and Cowper's on Mary Unwin, was the same. And, on the whole, its cry was a new thing in English song.

These directions of poetry were to be carried into the future. But Cowper belonged also partly to the

past; and those parts of his verse in which the worn-out influence of Dryden and Pope appears, are to us quite uninteresting, except historically. He wasted a long time on satirical and didactic poems—with titles such as these—"Table Talk," "Progress of Error," "Truth," "Expostulation," "Hope," "Charity," "Conversation and Retirement"; titles which, I fear, are likely to bore us by anticipation. I have read these poems and I did not care for them. They do not touch us now, save when Cowper's playful humour, as unlike Pope's wit as possible, steals into their dreary chambers and illuminates them for a moment with a lambent ray.

When he had shaken off these tiresome and conventional subjects a fortunate chance enabled him to move naturally among congenial things, and to move with that freedom and expansion which a poet loves, and in which he does his best work. Lady Austen, his sprightly friend, said to him one day: "Try your hand on blank verse." "I will," he answered, "if you will give me a subject." "Oh," she replied, "you can write on any subject. Write upon this sofa."

This was the Task given to him, and it named the poem. He soon left the sofa behind, and then wandered into the fields and woods. All the scenery round his dwelling is described, all its inhabitants, the sounds of Nature, the dashing of the stream, the wind in the great trees, the soft music of the waving corn, the warbling of the birds—even of the harsher-throated crew, the hill-top, the sleeping plain, the arch of the sky, the sudden storm, the outbreaking sunlight—Nature loved, almost for the first time, for her own sake, without the intrusion of man, save for that one

thin, thoughtful, quiet figure, who, not thinking of himself, rejoiced alone in what she gave him to admire and love. The verse keeps a quiet level; it does not rise into any lofty imaginations; it has no special surprises, rarely any awakening phrases; it is not the verse of a great poet—but it is sincere, full, natural. Its soft and gentle elements belong to the character they represent, and whom they make clear. It slips along like the full, soft swirling of the Ouse itself; like Nature's movement on a quiet day.

Then the poem glides into didactic preaching and satire, attacks the sins of cities, contrasts them with the blessings of a still country life, treats of various social and political ideas, of poetry, the pulpit, of the plagues that waste the vitals of a State—then, in contrast, of domestic happiness, of gardening and its joys, of himself moving, sadly humorous, among it all. It ends with three books dedicated to winter and its pursuits. These are the best, the fullest of pleasant fancy, of domestic passion, the easiest in verse, the most charming in description of Nature. The "Winter Evening" is the first—an interior by the fireside, with the thoughts suggested by it drifting, as conversation drifts, from point to point, while the snow falls outside and the frost is on the pane. The second is the "Winter Morning Walk," and the third the "Winter Walk at Noon." The "Morning Walk" begins with an excellent description of a frosty land, and all the games that Nature plays with stream and mill, field and woodland —then slips, but with great awkwardness, from the ice of the stream to the Winter Palace, ice-built, at Petersburg, and thence to a disquisition on despotism and freedom and the duties, rights, and fates of humanity

—and here are placed those ideas of the Revolution which he was to see shaped soon and terribly in France. The "Walk at Noon" gets near to Wordsworth's early work, as Cowper wanders in the woods and by the river in the clear sunlight of a wintry day. There are phrases in which we seem to catch the thought and the philosophic melody of Wordsworth.

What follows is not only in Wordsworth's spirit, but will show of what kind was his hand when he described natural scenery:

> The night was winter in his roughest mood,
> The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon,
> Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
> And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
> The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
> And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue
> Without a cloud, and white, without a speck,
> The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
> Again the harmony comes o'er the vale,
> And through the trees I view the embattled tower
> Whence all the music. I again perceive
> The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
> And settle in soft musings as I tread
> The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
> Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
> The roof, though movable, through all its length
> As the wind sways it, has yet well sufficed,
> And intercepting in their silent fall
> The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
> No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
> The redbreast warbles still, but is content
> With slender notes, and more than half suppressed;
> Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light
> From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
> From many a twig the pendent drops of ice,
> That tinkle in the withered leaves below.
> Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,

> Charms more than silence. Meditation here
> May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
> May give a useful lesson to the head,
> And learning wiser grow without his books.

Then, by a happy change of mood, he suddenly sees the wintry wood, where he walks, as it will be in spring, full of flowers, dismantled of its fleecy load, and flushed with green variety. "Wonderful transition!" he cries, "There lives and works," he adds, almost in the words of Wordsworth,

> A soul in all things, and that soul is God.

And he seems to glide, as the poetic spirit is bound to do, as Wordsworth did, into a Pantheism which as a personal soul he did not hold. I love these anticipations, as it were in the rough, of the main thoughts which were to be fully wrought out by future poets, and Cowper is full of them, drifts of the intellect of the world. Then comes all that he thinks of animals and of man's relation to them, and lastly his dream of the restitution of all things.

The poem is well worth reading, if while we read we will keep in mind the poetry which was to follow it. It is poetry on the frontier of a new world. And all Cowper's soul, all the best of him is in it. We live and move in his nature, and breathe his spirit. Much (the contemporary in it) has but little interest for us now, though it was the chief interest then. But the man himself, and the natural and universal in human nature on which he indirectly dwells, and the individual feeling of Cowper for the natural world—these are not temporary but eternal interests, and in them dwells

the vitality of the "Task." They speak to us now; they interest us now.

I said the best of him is in this poem. But not his best poetry. His best poetry is found first in the lyric pieces of simple pathos which he wrote concerning those he loved and when he was moved by some great misfortune like the sinking of the *Royal George*—and secondly in the acutely personal poetry written when he was alone with himself and his fate.

"The Loss of the *Royal George*" says neither too much nor too little. Its simplicity is almost Elizabethan, when Elizabethan poetry was simple. But its temperate outline is almost Greek; no strain in the pathos; and there is added to this the inimitable gentle grace which Cowper was capable of when he was at his best. "Boadicea" has a similar naturalness, but with less grace. But Cowper, in his retired life, was rarely national. His pathos collects round those he loved. The lines written when late in life he received his mother's picture have an exquisite grace of remembrance, a tenderness close to tears, a depth of love, mingled with self-pity, which is alone in the English poetry of the affections. Yet nothing can be more simple, more clear in diction and in thought. They rest on universal feeling—and Human Nature herself wrote them. They are too long to quote here, but I may quote another, even a finer masterpiece of pathos; and with it should be read its companion poem, "To Mary." This is the Sonnet to Mary Unwin, his dear and faithful friend for more than twenty years. "It unites," said Frank Palgrave, "to an exquisiteness in the turn of thought which the ancients would have called irony, an intensity

of pathetic tenderness peculiar to his loving and ingenuous nature."

Mary! I want a lyre with other strings,
  Such aid from Heaven as some have feign'd they drew,
  An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things;
That ere through age or woe I shed my wings,
  I may record thy worth with honour due,
  In verse as musical as thou art true,
And that immortalises whom it sings:
But thou hast little need. There is a Book
  By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look,
  A chronicle of actions just and bright—
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine;
And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.

The exquisite, sad, evening-haunted grace and gentleness of that cannot be bettered, nor can the tender simplicity of the poem which followed it, written as Cowper watched his friend from the other side of the fire in her unhappy decline, when her wits and her work were at an end. Softness and sadness and love belong to these poems.

But a higher imaginative force attends the poems which he wrote in his personal despair. In them, it is not softness, gentleness or grace which prevail, but the poignant agony of sorrow, despondency, despair, of sanity knowing it is on the verge of insanity. There are, at the end of his first poems, some terrible Sapphics, written when he was all but insane, which are steeped in misery. They begin:

Hatred and Vengeance, my eternal portion"—

but they are too dreadful to quote here. To read them is to know what secret depths of pain are hidden in

the heart of quiet men. Their fierce power is in a strange contrast to the meditative quietudes of the greater part of his work. I cannot help thinking that the poem on Alexander Selkirk,

I am monarch of all I survey,

has in it a personal note, more personal than the subject warrants. I seem to feel that Cowper wrote it on one of those days when the fear of the loneliness of insanity beset him and he fought against it in his room alone. It is this, perhaps, that lifts it into excellence. It has always impressed mankind, but it is hard to say why. A great deal of it is bald and ought to be unimpressive. But it does impress—and I believe it does so because Cowper's passionate sorrow for himself abides in it as power and smites on the spirit of its readers.

And now let us gather into one place those verses of his which are directly personal, in which imagination and art are at their highest in Cowper, for they were accompanied by an extraordinary intensity of passionate emotion. The first is somewhat quiet, and is to be found in the "Task," suddenly emerging, as if he could hold his sorrow in silence no longer:

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had himself
Been hurt by the Archers. In his side he bore,
And in his hands and feet the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed and bade me live.
Since then, with few associates, in remote
And silent woods I wander, far from those
My former partners of the peopled scene—
With few associates, and not wishing more.

Infinite, long-continued self-compassion fills the words, and the image of Christ met in the woods, hurt Himself, but able by His hurt to heal one who had, like Him, been wounded, lifts the passage into the region of the high imagination.

Then, less quiet, more intense, darkened by the irreversible damnation which he believed had gone out against him, are the personal lines in the poem on his mother's picture. He contrasts his hopeless, doomed condition with the heavenly peace his mother has attained :

> But me, scarce hoping to attain that rest,
> Always from port withheld, always distressed,
> Me, howling blasts drive devious, tempest-tost ;
> Sails ripped, seams opening wide, and compass lost ;
> And day by day some current's thwarting force
> Sets me more distant from a prosperous course.
> Yet oh, the thought that thou are safe—and he !
> That thought is joy, arrive what may to me.

The stamp of passion is on those lines ; the stamp of imagination in the full transference of himself into the soul of the tormented ship, and in the splendid use of the word " devious " in the third line. But they have not reached the final intensity, nor the highest imagination. That is reached in the last poem which Cowper wrote, in the midst of the three last years of his madness and his life. This is the " Castaway." His sorrow again collects itself round the image of the ship, the sea, and the distracted sailors—an image he used in one of his earliest poems. The poem is nobly composed, in it the imagination has welded together the poet's fate with that of the sailor who fell overboard from Anson's ship, and it is written with as much of the

logic as of the passion of imagination. He cannot help beginning in the first person; realising the night and the terror as his own. He is the lost sailor:

Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft
His floating home for ever left.

He changes then to description in the third person, but we feel as we read of the swimmer's despair of life, of the pitiless blast which forbade his friends to rescue him, of the useless succour of the cask and cord, of the bitter thought that the ship must leave him to his fate —that we are looking straight into the misery of Cowper's soul. Nay, he paints in it all the vicissitudes of his life—his struggle always on the edge of destruction.

Not long beneath the whelming brine
Expert to swim, he lay,
Nor soon he felt his strength decline
Or courage die away,
But waged with death a lasting strife
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted, nor his friends had failed
To check the vessel's course,
But so the furious blast prevailed
That, pitiless, perforce
They left their outcast mate behind,
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succour yet they could afford
And such as storms allow—
The cask, the coop, the floated cord
Delayed not to bestow.
But he, they knew, nor ship nor shore,
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

CHAPTER VI

ROBERT BURNS

ROBERT BURNS, of whom Scotland is justly proud, was the child of his own country, and his poetic ancestors were not English, but Scottish. When I say that—and I shall enlarge on it afterwards—I exclude the poetry he wrote in ordinary English, in which he did not use his native dialect. These poems, in verse, diction and manner, are full of English echoes, and derive from Shenstone, Gray and others of that time. The only distinctive element they have is that now and then the irrepressible genius of the man, his rustic, national individuality, bursts, like a sudden gush of clear water, for a line or two, out of the dull expanse of his imitative verse. He should have done, with all impulses on his own part to write in English, and with all requests from others to do so, what David did with Saul's armour, put it off when he had worn it once and said, "I cannot go with these—I have not proved them."

Poets should cling to their natural vehicle, to their native song. When Burns put on English dress, his singing robes slipped off him, his genius moved in fetters, he lost his distinction, his wit ran away, his passion was not natural; above all, the lovely charm of his words—their pleasant surprises, their delicate shades of expression, even their subtle melodies like the melodies of Nature herself, of the wind in the trees,

of the brook over the pebbles, of the wild whispering of the sea, deserted him. It is wise to skip almost everything that he wrote in English, for there he was encumbered by alien traditions; and the traditions were those of the conventional poetry, and amazingly foreign to his genius.

There were two other elements in his poetry which were foreign to his fresh Naturalism, to his genius. The first of these was his tendency to personification. That smacked of the past poetry both English and Scottish. Dunbar, Lyndsay and Ramsay used this as much as Spenser or Gray. And Burns, though his poetry was like a new day, could not quite, any more than Coleridge, get rid of this remnant of yesterday.

The second thing was his habit of moralising in poetry, of drawing lessons for life not indirectly, but directly, from Nature, from human events. I cannot quite trace this habit to the previous Scottish poets. I believe it came to Burns from Gray. Sometimes it is as well done as it is by Gray, sometimes with even a greater freshness, as in the two admirable poems on turning up the nest of the field mouse with the plough, and on seeing a louse climbing a lady's bonnet in church. At other times, though the moralising is well expressed, it is not naturally expressed. It sounds as if he had taken it from some one else, as if it belonged to the old didactic strain, not to the new world of poetry, the gate of which he threw open. It is a reversion, not a creation of his own. And, as poetry, though not as a piece of sermon, it is somewhat wearying. We miss in it the freshness of the new wind which had begun to blow, and we miss the new Naturalism. At these two points Burns had clinging to him some of

the rags of the past. At this last point he is rather the English than the Scottish poet. His greatest power, that which made him different from all the poets of his time, that which introduced into the time at which he wrote an element which revolutionised its lyric singing, was his absolute naturalness, the opposite and the enemy of convention in poetry. He bubbled up into poetry like a springing well into an arid plain, and the plain grew fertile as the well made itself into a stream and watered the desert. We have seen how Cowper began that in England in the natural quietudes of the "Task," and in a few deeply felt lyrics. But Cowper's character and circumstances forbade the unchastened naturalness of Burns, who immediately followed his own impulse without a thought of what the world would say; who flashed the impulse of the moment into verse; to whom everything was a subject, but who chose the last subject which occurred to him when he had a more eager impulse than usual; who never asked why or what he should sing;

> For me, an aim I never fash—
> I rhyme for fun.

As it came he took the world, as the moment came he made his poem. The circumstance of the moment flew into verse. He lived and wrote; loving and ranting, laughing and weeping, slashing his foes and flattering his friends, wooing and loving and sorrowing; praying and cursing; now with the Jolly Beggars, now with Mary in Heaven, in the alehouse, in the church, by the brookside in the summer, on the hills in the drifting snow, by the dark sea in storm; dancing and half-drunk at the Holy Fair and Halloween, or sitting douce

and grave in the religious quiet of the Cottar's Saturday Night. Everything seemed to suit his hand, and naturalness was at the root of all. He sang as the bird sings on the bough. The long struggle for Naturalism, which we have followed from the time of Pope till now, received its first complete realisation in the Scottish poetry of Burns. This, of course, is the same as saying that he was sincere. He had that great quality. No one can ever doubt, as he reads any poem of Burns, that he is saying in it exactly what he felt. Nothing is reconsidered; no mask is worn; there is no thought of what the world would say, no modifications on that account. We touch the very life of the man at the moment, the very truth—and, when we are weary of the quantity of insincere poetry which we read, or of poetry over-wrought by art, to read Burns is a mighty consolation. And, indeed, it is almost a lesson in the high moralities. We understand better what Truth means, what a loveliness, as of the ideal world, it bestows on work in which it shines. That is so true that it glorifies poems in Burns which the dainty Philistines think coarse.

But naturalness and sincerity do not make a poet. There are hundreds who possess these qualities who could not make a verse, nor sing them into a song. Along with them there must be the natural gift, the shaping power of imagination, the executive hand of the born artist. And I am not sure that any of our poets possessed this natural gift, *i.e.*, within his range, which was not that of the greater poets, in richer fullness than Burns. Other poets begin with inferior work and somewhat slowly reach their excellence. They have to train their powers. Burns leaped at once into his proper

excellence. His masterpieces were nearly all written in the first six months of his poetical life, and they were masterpieces in three or four different kinds of poetry. There was no need to correct or polish them, to recompose, or to lay them aside. They gushed out like a fountain, clear and full, from the living rock—their shaping, their melody, their passion, their subject-matter alive and natural, needing no work, no change, born like a flower of the field.

"Within his range," remember; and that range was limited. Were I not to guard what I have said by this phrase, I might seem to equal him with the greater poets who move on the higher planes of thought, and travel over larger lands towards infinite horizons. Burns cannot be classed with them, but, all the same, he is often more natural and sincere than they, and his natural gift, so far as it was capable of going, was more spontaneous than theirs. Theirs needed care and work to bring to excellence, his did not.

When we find naturalness and sincerity combined in a man, we find the testing-stones of his character. However other parts of his character or his circumstances may influence him, these two qualities will lead our judgments concerning him into rightness. For want of recognising these two qualities in him, Burns has been rudely or foolishly praised or blamed by men. His naturalness, left uncontrolled and hurried on into excess by the strength of his passions, led him astray into weakness; and with women into folly, vanity and sensuality. But his sincerity in all he did, even in wrong—his deep sincerity with himself, should lead us to judge him gently, and humbly as well as firmly, in wonder whether we should have done only

half as well, had we had his nature and his genius. And so Wordsworth felt concerning him—Wordsworth who had almost a Puritan morality. No tenderer, humbler verses were ever written than he wrote about Burns. So also felt Carlyle, so felt R. L. Stevenson. Others have been more priggish in their judgments, but even they are fascinated. Fascination is the word. The weaknesses, the follies, the sins of Burns do not die; they must be felt and condemned; but they earn the pardon of some because of their passionate naturalness, and of others because of his rare and noble sincerity.

But I do not speak here of his character. Enough and to spare has been written about that. The critics who write about Burns cannot keep off that subject! They spend, like Carlyle, like Stevenson, like Professor Shairp, three-fourths of their essays on the moral and psychological questions which arise out of his career; and they shove the literature of the man into the background. It seems a wonderful novelty for them—living in the midst of a conventional society, and reading for the most part books which smack of the literary cliques, and of the temporary drifts of the time—to come across a man who lived as natural a life as we may suppose Adam lived, and felt like a child born on the original Aryan steppe—doing, thinking and feeling, even after he had been to Edinburgh, just exactly what his will urged him, at the moment, to do. There is a naïveté in the suppressed astonishment of the critics over this phenomenon which always amuses me. Carlyle makes a whole series of sermonettes about Burns. Even Stevenson preaches, with an air, it is true, of detachment, but with a judicial note, flavoured with

a self-conceited legality, which offends me. As to Shairp and many others, their moralities are almost Pharisaic. None of them seems to feel, as he writes, that Burns was as far above them as a star is above the earth; and that, naughty as he was, he was, even through all his follies and weaknesses, wiser at heart than they.

I turn to him as a poet. He had, in his best poetry, no English ancestors. All his poetic ancestry was in Scotland. He was the culmination of a long line of poets who wrote in the Lowlands, and who derived more than half of their special qualities from the Celtic blood so largely infused into the whole country which lay between Edinburgh and Glasgow, between the Border and the valleys of the Forth and the Clyde. The characteristics which are distributed through James I., Barbour, Henryson, Dunbar, Douglas, Ramsay and Ferguson, appear also in Burns, and glorified. He was their climax. He inherited them, and they were Scottish, not English, and, for the most part, Celtic, not Teutonic—Celtic in their love of Nature, their rollicking humour, their hot, frank and satiric abuse, their nationality, their isolated individuality, their pathetic power, and their quick passion for women. At every one of these points English poetry is of a different temper, manner and tradition—and Burns is less an English poet than Theocritus or Catullus. He is outside of the tradition. That is the reason why, when he attempted to write in "the English," he made such a mess of it.

Being of this descent, he was not unworthy of it. He concentrated into his work all the qualities and excellences of the poets who preceded him. He was the

flowering of this tree that, rooted in the Lowlands, had grown into a noble expansion through the summers and winters of four centuries. I might trace in Burns the elements of Henryson, Barbour, or Dunbar brought to their best shaping and life, were not that too long a criticism for this place; but take his closer predecessors, take Ramsay and Ferguson. Their work is fairly good here and there. Its elements are in a great part the elements of Burns. But there is as much difference between their shaping and his of these elements, and of the class of subjects into which they and he enter, as there is between the chatter of a sparrow and the song of the nightingale. He is the poet, the flowering of their song. Nothing so good was before him, and nothing so good after him, nothing half so sincere, half so natural or half so passionate.

As such he was, of course, national. Carlyle, who ought to have known better, seems to think that the poetry of Scottish nationality was only born into a full life in Burns. Burns himself fell into that error. Scottish poetry, even when, as with the first James, it derived impulse from England, clung pertinaciously to its own country. The Chaucerian poems of Scotland reject the conventional landscape of Chaucer and insert that of their own land. Whatever English form the Scottish poets used they reanimated with the spirit of Scotland. The ballads are alive with national feeling. The greater Makers are no exception. Barbour is on fire with national feeling, he hates the English. Dunbar's "Golden Targe" thrills with it, and his "Thistle and the Rose" sings little of the Rose and much of the Thistle. Douglas paints hour by hour the landscape of his own low hills in May and winter. Not an expres-

sion, not a picture is even touched by England. Alexander Scott, like the others, personifies his native land with a steadfast and moral patriotism. Ramsay, Ferguson, before Burns—a shoal of inferior poets after him, bubble with nationality.

But Burns threw around it a passion and a beauty of imaginative words, a charm of personification, which it had never had before, and never has had since.

"The Poetic Genius of my country found me, as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisha—at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over me. She bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures, in my native tongue. I tuned my wild, artless notes as she inspired."

He keeps himself throughout to the scenery, the subjects, the heroes, the warlike struggles, the rustic life, the women of his own land. His Muse is wholly untravelled. Carlyle said he had "a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling"—it is far too large a statement, but what there is of human feeling is all Scottish. The Muse of Scotland appears to him—let us read some of that vision. It well illustrates all I say; it is almost the best criticism of his own poetry.

The Muse tells how she loved him from his birth and listened to his

> rudely carolled, chiming phrase,
> in uncouth rhymes.

And then she sketches him as the poet, and all the elements of his genius:

> I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
> Delighted with the dashing roar;

And when the North his fleecy store
  Drove through the sky,
I saw grim Nature's visage hoar
  Struck thy young eye.

Or when the deep green-mantled earth
Warm cherished every floweret's birth,
And joy and music pouring forth
  In every grove,
I saw thee eye the general mirth
  With boundless love.

When ripened fields, and azure skies,
Called forth the reapers' rustling noise,
I saw thee leave their evening joys,
  And lonely stalk,
To vent thy bosom's swelling rise
  In pensive walk.

When youthful love, warm-blushing, strong,
Keen-shivering shot thy nerves along—
Those accents, grateful to thy tongue,
  The adorèd Name—
I taught thee how to pour in song
  To soothe thy flame.

I saw thy pulses' maddening play
Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way,
Misled by Fancy's meteor ray,
  By Passion driven,
And yet the light that led astray
  Was light from Heaven.

Nor must we leave Burns without hearing some of the lines written to William Simpson; the last verse of which found a still nobler representation in "Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled," composed as he rode against the fierce wind and rain over the lonely moors of Galloway, silent and grim with patriotic passion. This is national enough:

Ramsay and famous Ferguson
Gied Forth an' Tay a lilt aboon
Yarrow an' Tweed to monie a tune
  Owre Scotland rings,
While Irwin, Lugar, Ayr an' Doon,
  Naebody sings.

The Ilissus, Tiber, Thames an' Seine,
Glide sweet in monie a tunefu' line!
But, Willie, set your fit to mine,
  An' cock your crest;
We'll gar our streams an' burnies shine
  Up wi' the best.

We'll sing auld Coila's plains and fells,
Her moors red-brown wi' heather bells,
Her banks an' braes, her dens an' dells,
  Where glorious Wallace
Oft bare the gree, as story tells,
  Frae Southron billies.

At Wallace' name, what Scottish blood
But boils up in a spring-tide flood?
Oft have our fearless fathers strode
  By Wallace' side:
Still pressing onwards, red-wat-shod,
  Or glorious died.

On the other side, there is not unfrequently felt in his poetry the influence, like a perfume wafted from cultivated fields far away, which flits with the wind over a wild moorland, of the half-classical, half-courtly note of the Augustan school. Along with this there is also a touch of chivalrous sentiment such as might be derived from the Scottish sentiment for the Stuarts. These two elements steal strangely in among the rustic songs, and especially among the love-songs. To the first we owe the conventions of Sol and Phœbus, and others of

the same kind. To it also we owe certain artificial love-poems which read as if they were written by the Caroline poets. Moreover, an element of reflective morality on life, and another of deistic religion, carried, at times, into a personal relation to God by the natural passion of Burns, seem to belong to this influence.

To the second, to the Cavalier element (and Burns read the Cavalier songs), we may owe a few of the finest of his songs, not especially about the Stuarts—his Jacobite songs are commonplace—but about those Scots who carried their love of fighting, their hatred of England and their sword into a foreign service. The best of these I quote, and nothing better was ever done in this way. The gathering night, the wet wind on the sea, the lonely spirit of the exile, his cavalier spirit, his passionate love, his battle-courage, his presentiment of death, are all woven together into a lyric whole:

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
  An' fill it in a silver tassie,
That I may drink, before I go,
  A service to my bonnie lassie.
The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,
  Fu' loud the wind blows frae the ferry,
The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
  And I maun leave my bonnie Mary.

The trumpets sound, the banners fly,
  The glittering spears are rankèd ready;
The shouts o' war are heard afar,
  The battle closes thick and bloody;
But it's no the roar o' sea or shore
  Wad mak me langer wish to tarry;
Nor shout o' war that's heard afar—
  It's leaving thee, my bonnie Mary!

These are the modifications of his dominant nationality.

Next, right down from the Celtic spirit, comes the ranting, roaring wit of Burns, and secondly, the savage brilliancy of his satire—what the old Scottish poets called "flyting." Of the first there is no finer example in the language than "The Jolly Beggars." Villon never did anything more real, more vital, more keenly in the subject. It never flags for a moment. Every man and woman in it is alive to the last rag on their bodies; and coarse as they are, it is impossible, so vivid is their humanity, to help feeling kindly to them, even to regret not being with them for a time. Their jollity seems to redeem their naughtiness. It is a masterpiece. So is, in a less reckless society, "Tam O' Shanter." Every one knows that poem. Its mirth, its philosophy, its strange touches of moral sentiment, its spiritualisation of drunkenness, its visions of the invisible, its happy turns of wit, its admirable phrases, its amazing dash and rush from end to end, all mingled into harmony, linked easily together, the changes never seeming out of place, the style always right, make it one of the joys of literature. Wit has seldom been more gay, the force of life has seldom been so unbroken; it races in full tide through every line.

He was capable, however, of a more delicate humour, which chiefly played round the quips and cranks and wiles of love affairs. The best example of this, having, beyond the event, to do with a common, almost a universal element in human nature, is "Duncan Gray cam' here to woo,"—a thing shaped as well as a lyric girl, nothing in it which ought to be out, nothing out which ought to be in. Other poems of the same happy, lively, soft humour, play like children through his book of songs. He was a kindly creature; his heart was open

to all humanity. He loved the world; and nowhere is this wide affectionateness shown more than in his gay poems of humour. I think it was this affectionateness in the man, this universal love, which made his humour so natural, so unforced, so unwearying. We never hear a laboured or a conventional note in it. It is as fresh as his passion. However, he was splendidly capable of savage satiric wit. And on this side he descends from the Celtic spirit. "The Holy Fair," "The Ordination," the "Address to the Unco' Guid," "Holy Willie's Prayer," "Death and Doctor Hornbook," are scathing, outspoken, unsparing slaughters in verse. They are, perhaps, the things in his poetry which most display his intellectual genius. In satire of this kind—the fierce, stinging, witty, merciless satire, the naked mockery, the indignant lash—he stands alone. No one has ever done the same kind of thing so well—and those who felt the whip deserved it. But these satirical poems are not to be compared, as poetry, to the songs. They are first in their own class, but their class is not a high one. They seem also to be exceptions to his general kindliness. But they are partly modified by the laughing wit that runs through them; and what they attack was the only thing that Christ spoke harshly of—want of love, cruelty, condemnation of the weak, combined with hypocrisy. Just indignation was at the root of his satire, the indignation of lovingkindness with a religion and a morality of damnation.

It is said that humour and pathos are closely connected, that the true humorist is capable of the most pathetic expression. However that may be, Burns, when he felt deeply, was a master of pathos. He had, like the Celt, the sorrow of his wit and the wit of his sorrow.

His melancholy was as profound as his flashing humour was bright; and he passed in a moment from one to the other. This was the Celtic nature in him. It is strange to turn from "The Jolly Beggars" to "Mary Morison," from "The Holy Fair" to "Mary in Heaven," from "Duncan Gray" to "The Banks of Doon." Their contrasts illustrate the range of Burns, but the contrasts are very great.

I do not care to criticise or dwell upon the beauty of these pathetic things. It is best to read them, to leave them to make their own impression.

To read these poems is to realise how passionately he could love and enshrine his love; and Burns, in that progress of Naturalism of which we have been speaking, restored to our poetry, after a long interval, the passionate love-poem. It can scarcely be said to have existed since the days of Dryden. But now, like a Princess that had slept a hundred years, it woke up at the kiss of a Prince of Poetry, and broke out into singing and sang a hundred songs, about herself, and her whims and vagaries, her joys and sorrows, her gaiety and melancholy, her profound happiness and exaltation in passionate feeling. It was like a naked tree bursting into a million leaves—a grey meadow suddenly starred with a multitude of flowers.

And this sprang out of the heart of a peasant, as I may well call Burns, though he was a small farmer's son. It was underived from other poets, though we can trace its rise in Ramsay and Ferguson. It was pure Scotland, for Burns had not read the Elizabethan songs. It was unassisted by any literary class, for the best of the love-lyrics were made before he went to Edinburgh; nor was there a soul in Edinburgh capable of writing one of

them. It rose fresh from the natural earth and the life of those who lived by the earth; born while the poet drove the plough and reaped the corn and milked the cow and watched the sheep. The Muse was tired of didactic philosophy and satire, of refined and classic verse, of faded sentiment; she had enough of Crabbe's stern miseries, of Cowper's unimpassioned softness, of the slow river and the stately grove, of the sandy shore and the grey waves. She wanted something fresh, living, intense in feeling; she wanted frank natural passion, and scenery to match its wildness and its strength, the dashing torrent and the lonely moor, the dark lake and the long-ridged hills, the larks singing in the solitudes, the chasing clouds and sunlight on the mountain side, the birches rustling in the glen, the wild storm that drifted the deep snow. And she made Burns and gave him the passion of Nature and man:

> Gie me ane spark of Nature's fire,
> That's a' the learning I desire;
> Then, though I trudge through dirt and mire,
> At plough or cart;
> My Muse, though hamely in attire,
> May touch the heart.

And the love-poetry was not of cavalier and lady, of gentlefolk in society or in the settled life of English counties, but of the poor in their cottages, and in the scattered huts upon the moor:

> Love hath he found in huts where poor men lie.

He sings the old man and his wife going down life's hill together to the far-off land beyond death, the merry-hearted girl who meets her lover at the fair, the lovers trysting by the mill-stream and where the corn-rigs are bonny; where the rye stands tall, and where the

hazels grow by the stream in the meadows, where at even the sheep are called home, where broom and the gowan and the bluebell are listening to the linnet, everywhere within that wild soft Lowland country, where, among its crossing glens, Nith and Callawater stray, till all Nature as she lives in this pastoral country is closely inwoven with the love of maid and man. He sings the lighter forms of love, its moments, its fleeting passion. He sings the love of a lifetime, its steadiness, its honour, and its serious passion. He sings the passion of the sorrows of love, its partings, its misfortunes, its despairs, its rapture. Almost every note is touched, and for the most part with an honest sincerity and manliness which is enchanting. Read "The Birks of Aberfeldy," read "I love my Jean," read:

O, my love's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June:
O, my love's like the melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.

And read, for joy and nature and delight in loving, "O Saw ye Bonnie Lesly," and then, for the pity and passion of pitiful love, listen to "Highland Mary"—the love that might have saved him and that fate denied him.

I have said that he wove together Nature and lovers. His way with Nature was to weave her into the life of man. She is not loved for her own sake only, as Wordsworth and Shelley loved her. She is loved, but along with man and woman, as Gray and Collins loved her, but far more than they. The love of Nature has grown up to fuller stature since their time. It is almost as fresh, as natural in Burns as it is in Wordsworth, but it has no philosophy, and Nature in it has no separate

An' think na', my auld, trusty servan',
That now perhaps thou's less deservin',
An' thy auld days may end in starvin',
For my last fou,
A heapit stimpart, I'll reserve ane
Laid by for you.

We've worn to crazy years thegither;
We'll toyte about wi' ane anither;
Wi' tentie care I'll flit thy tether
To some hain'd rig,
Where ye may nobly rax your leather,
Wi' sma' fatigue.

This was the pleasant fashion in which, like Cowper, he re-introduced, with the sincerest feeling, the affection of man for the animal world and the comradeship between them, as a subject for poetry; and none of all the poets who followed him in this has done it with more naturalness. When his coulter turns up the nest of the field mouse, he talks to it as to a hurt child. He has harmed a fellow creature:

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies the ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

That will be the note of a really civilised society. It is not the note of our half-barbarous condition.

The last quality of his poetry which I instance is its strong personal note. I said that Cowper brought back, in this new Naturalism, personal revelation into English poetry. Burns did the same thing in Scotland. He paints himself just as he is, with the finest sincerity, with no dressing up for public. The lectures the critics

give him for his aimless and uncontrolled life he gives to himself; and in far clearer and better words than they use. If a poet, recognised to be a quite true person, describes his character and its faults as they are, and draws quite justly and sternly the moral of them, the public might let him alone and the moralist critics might cease to preach. They only weary the publicans and sinners, and double the conceit of the Pharisees. There is no need for their long-winded dissertations. We know Burns through and through from himself, and I sometimes wish he were now alive in order to satirise these gentlemen who make him the text of their sermons. If you want to see and feel the man—if you want to take a moral warning from his life—or to learn from him how to live apart from the world and wisely—collect his personal statements—read them together—and the very living, thinking, loving, failing, noble creature will stand by your side, exactly, minutely, as he was in the centre of his spirit.

He painted other men as clearly as he painted himself, whenever he cared to do this work. He had a wonderful, keen eye for the outside of all the types of men he met, he had just as keen an eye for their souls whether they were bad or good. And the words, the fiery phrases with which he described what he saw, were as vital, as lucid, as sharp as his sight. The execution was as clear as the conception. Words were his servants. He said to them: "Do this," and they did it. We know the whole of his society, their houses, their way of life, their dress, their pleasures, their amusements at the fair, on the farm, at the meeting-house; when they preach and drink and dance, and read the evening prayer, and wander with their sweethearts by the river.

We can build all the different types, and the full type also itself of that society into our mind. No poetry is more individualising. But beyond the range of the society he knew his poetry does not travel. His range as a poet is then limited. The greater world of thoughts and passions was not for him ; nor its mightier doings. Even in his own world of lyric poetry, he is almost entirely limited to the love-lyric. Into that far wider world of the lyric, whither we have been led by the poets that followed him, he did not come. His circle as a poet was then small, but within it he was excellent. And one thing was the source of his excellence. It was the deep charity of his nature. No one ever loved his fellows, and the natural world with them, better than he. He lives not only by his style, as some have said, but because the spirit of his style was Love, and the master of his imagination was Love:

> Deep in the general heart of man
> His power survives.

CHAPTER VII

WORDSWORTH, THE POET OF NATURE

In Wordsworth, we arrive at the culmination of Naturalism, the course of which we have traced for so long. The nature of man was the main burden of his song. He claimed it for his special subject; and hereafter we shall see what he made of it. But the nature of man has always been the great subject of poetry. What had not been one of the main subjects of poetry was outward Nature—the material universe as it presents itself in all its vast variety to our thought and our affection. It was continually represented in all poetry as the scenery in front of which the drama of mankind was acted, but it did not become a distinct subject for the poets, a subject apart from human nature, loved for itself alone, described for its own sake, conceived of as a comrade, a friend, a personality, having a universal life, and able to communicate with us, till Wordsworth so conceived it in the realm of poetry. And immediately a new poetry, or another sphere of poetry, came into being. More than a century has passed by since he did this work, but the impulse he thus gave has lasted, almost undiminished in interest and power, to the present day. What he thought about Nature is the matter of this chapter.

Nature, the outward universe, lay before him. What is it? he asked. What is moving there? Day by day, from his childhood, the mountains, skies, waters, woods

had stolen into his soul through the gates of the senses, till all the particular and separate impressions had been mingled into one universal impression. And he was driven at last to feel that in and beneath the matter of the universe, multitudinously shaping and reshaping itself into a million, million forms, there was a soul, a living principle, acting, even thinking, it may be loving; and at last speaking to him, communicating itself to him.

> In all things, in all natures, in the stars
> Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,
> In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
> That paves the brooks; the stationary rocks,
> The moving waters and the invisible air—

this active principle abides; from link to link

> It circulates, the soul of all the worlds.

To this active principle Wordsworth, in the realm of poetry, gave a kind of personality—a character, a will of its own—and called it Nature. She was the life-giving spirit who built up the universe, who from her own universal life gave to each particular thing, the smallest flower, the drift of a gossamer cloud, its own distinct life, its own soul, its own work. This idea he multiplied and enlarged.

All these separate lives in flower, crag and stream, mingling together in his poetic conception, formed a larger, higher, more manifold life and character for every separate wood, or lonely dell, or mountain hollow with its darkened tarn, or a whole mountain from base to peak—so that he could speak of the "souls of lonely places"—souls more manifold than those that dwelt in a single drop of dew or pebble of the brook.

Still further he carried this thought of life, and the

great divisions of the natural world; the whole of the sky, or of the sea, or of the earth, were each gifted with separate yet more complex being. "Listen," he cries of the sea—

Listen, the mighty Being is awake.

Of course, this thought could be infinitely varied. He makes the moving powers of Nature, the wind dancing over wood and hill, tossing the trees and grass, and lifting the heads of the flowers; the river dancing round the stones, the clouds flying through the sky and filling the glens with shadows; the stars which, as they rise and set, speak to the mountain peaks or live in the calm lake another life—he makes these moving powers the Over-soul of the things they touch, adding to them a new life of joy and jollity, of solemnity or peace, their playmate, their friend, their lover—life playing with life, comrade with comrade, till all the world was intercommunion.

And great Nature herself, the accumulated life of all these lives, their all-giving, all-receiving force, had, in his poetic conception, her own personal pleasures, emotions and thoughts. She rolls the sea, and builds the mountain chain, fulfils the seasons, sets the stars afloat, orders the universe. In these, her mighty operations, we scarcely feel her personality. But we do feel it in her lighter affections, in her caprices, her subtilties of choice. In Wordsworth, she chooses, as we do, certain places for her special delight, such as the one green field, with its pool and tree, hidden away from the world, of which he says:

This spot was made by Nature for herself.

These are her private doings, her personal pleasures, her individual fantasies, and for these she has a special

love. She companions with the souls of places she herself has made.

Nor does she only love in and for herself. She is close to man, and loves men, women and children, not as they love one another, but with an elemental love. The poets are her special friends. She was with Wordsworth, he thinks, from his birth. Men, like his brother, silent poets who could feel her power, were dearly loved by her. All gracious souls were her companions and her friends. And sometimes she chose, out of the rest, delightful maidens to be her favourites, on whom she lavished the education of her love:

> Three years she grew in sun and shower;
> Then Nature said—A lovelier flower
> On earth was never sown;
> This child I to myself will take;
> She shall be mine, and I will make
> A lady of my own.
>
> Myself will to my darling be
> Both law and impulse; and with me
> The girl, in rock or plain,
> In earth and heaven, in glade and bower
> Shall feel an overseeing power
> To kindle and restrain.
>
> She shall be sportive as the fawn,
> That wild with glee across the lawn
> Or up the mountain springs;
> And hers shall be the breathing balm,
> And hers the silence and the calm
> Of mute insensate things.
>
> The floating clouds their state shall lend
> To her; for her the willow bend;
> Nor shall she fail to see
> Even in the motions of the storm
> Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
> By silent sympathy.

The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
  In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
  Shall pass into her face.

And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
  Her virgin bosom swell:
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
  Here in this happy dell.

Thus Nature spake.

Could impersonation go further, or be more real, more alive, more happy? We are quite satisfied that Nature has a personal life, while we read the poem, and we carry the belief with us, such is Wordsworth's power, through our own life with the outward world. No dead matter meets us there, but a living soul. This is the spirit of a hundred poems, varied into a hundred forms. Nature is a life, a universal life, conscious of herself, capable of realising herself not only as a universal whole, but in each part of the whole. No conception can be more different from this than the mechanical universe of Pope, than the dead universe of Cowper and Crabbe, than the mere background of humanity which Nature is to Burns.

Of course, this may be said to be a mere poetic impersonation. But it was more to Wordsworth. He gave it substance, took it out of the realm of mere fancy, when he linked this life back to his conception of God pervading the universe. It was in the Thought of God that the universe existed, and its life was in God's

Thought. Nay, the life in every flower, bird, insect, in the acorn of the oak and the mossy stone on the hillside, was in the incessant Thought of God. As such, Nature herself and everything in Nature might have a life of its own, might be conscious of its own life. It was not absurd for thought to make that conception, and it breaks out in a famous passage :

> Wisdom and Spirit of the universe :
> Thou Soul, that art the Eternity of thought,
> And giv'st to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion—
>
> * * * *
>
> Thou Being that art in the clouds and air,
> That art in the green leaves and in the groves—
>
> * * * *
>
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

This is Pantheism, or very near it. But I have always urged that both the scientific man and the artist, especially the poet, when they live with Nature only, lost, it may be, in the solitude of the hills, apart from man, must not only lose their own personality, but will feel God as impersonal—as Thought or Energy alone, or Love alone, as all-pervading, having none of the limits of what we call the personal. And so, Wordsworth, face to face with Nature, in lonely hours, conceived Him.

Nevertheless, for the sake of his art, for the sake of shaping his thought so that it should be conceived and loved by others, he embodied his idea of an infinite

Spirit in the universe in the shape of a personality whom he creates and calls Nature. This form he uses throughout his poetry. Nature is to him a person; has a being of her own; realises herself as one in the whole of the universe, realises herself again in each form of the outward world, as a distinct life in each distinct thing.

It was possible for him, then, through this artistic conception, to have communication with any one manifestation of that life—with a cloud—a tree—a star—a mountain summit—a stream; to separate the life of one from the life in another, or, omitting the consideration of the parts, to think of and communicate with the whole, with the one spiritual life of the universe, as with a Person from whom he could receive impulse, joy or warning, whom he could love, who could consecrate him to his work and educate him for it.

And all through his poetry this conception in a thousand forms prevails, and, as clearly though not so beautifully expressed, in his age as in his youth. In youth it was a passion, in age it was a peace. The "Evening Voluntaries" are as full of quiet joy in Nature and of gratitude for her long work upon his heart, the joy and gratitude of a serene old age that has not forgotten youth, as the following lines are full of the intense ecstasy and pure passion of a youthful poet in the life, love and loveliness of Nature. He sees the mighty uprising of the sun—the daily resurrection of life and light:

> Such was the Boy—but for the growing youth
> What soul was his, when, from the naked top
> Of some bold headland, he beheld the Sun
> Rise up and bathe the world in light! He looked—
> Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth

> And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
> Beneath him: Far and wide the clouds were touched,
> And in their silent faces could be read
> Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
> Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
> The spectacle; sensation, soul and form,
> All melted into him; they swallowed up
> His animal being; in them did he live,
> And by them did he live; they were his life.
> In such access of mind, in such high hour
> Of visitation from the living God,
> Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
> No thanks he breathed; he proffered no request:
> Rapt into still communion that transcends
> The imperfect offices of prayer or praise;
> His mind was a thanksgiving to the Power
> That made him; it was blessedness and love.

There are many of us who would give half our life to be able to feel like that—and all we have to be able to express it with a similar power.

There were to Wordsworth three special characteristics of this life of Nature—its joy, its quietude and the intercommunion of its love. They do not enter into the scientific view of Nature, and are in contrast with that view. We have heard a great deal of Nature red in tooth and claw, of the cruelties of Nature, of its rigid sternness, of its furies, storms and savagery, of anything but its love. And from the point of view which science takes, having only to do with what is apparent, of which the intellect or the senses inform us, the statements have a great deal of truth in them. But while we confess their truth to phenomena, it does not follow that there is not another side to the matter, or that another point of view is impossible. Even to the man of science there lies behind the mighty wasting,

terrors and savagery of Nature's forces the strange quiet of ordered law, the calm of unity of idea, the conception of a central peace, the passing onwards of emotionless energy to a final quiet. He is conscious that beyond the apparent waste, and what he calls the cruelty of life, there is the selection of the best, the evolution of higher and more complex life, the securing of continuance, and in the realm of these ideas he can repose in quiet. Nor can he deny beauty as one result of Nature, nor his own emotion of joy and love as he beholds it. Much more is this the case of the poet and of the poetic heart. He sees joy and peace and love in Nature, and indeed what he sees and feels is as plain as that which the student of science sees. The impressions are opposed, but they are both there, both real. Both are felt in fullness by different minds, and the testimony of the one class of mind is just as worthy of credence as that of the other. The absolute truth is probably a resultant of these seeming contradictions, and we have not the power as yet to reach it. We may go with the scientific philosopher when we study phenomena, and derive much truth and practical good. But that will not prevent us from going with the poet, when such is our pleasure, and finding with him other phases of good and truth in the study of those things in Nature which fit into the soul, which stir in us the perception of beauty, which soften and heal the trouble of the heart, which speak to us of joy and peace, which kindle the imagination into creation. And that Nature does this for us, is a fact which cannot be denied. The poets express this world of fact for us; and all the emotion that flows from it.

Wordsworth saw joy in Nature, and it awakened joy

in him. To him it was, finally, the joy of God in His own creative life; "the ancient rapture," as Browning called it, which God had in the continuous act of creation; thought incessantly passing into form. But Wordsworth, writing poetry, was content to feel the joy as it was seen in Nature herself, without continually referring it to the metaphysical action of the Deity. Wherever, then, he went, he went through a rejoicing world; and he married to its joy the joy of his own heart. He received delight and he gave back delight. There is no poem in which he records this more fully than in the first on the "Naming of Places." Here it is—it is the finest expression of this delightful and delighting passion ever written in this world:

It was an April morning: fresh and clear
The Rivulet, delighting in its strength,
Ran with a young man's speed; and yet the voice
Of waters which the winter had supplied
Was softened down into a vernal tone.
The spirit of enjoyment and desire,
And hopes and wishes, from all living things
Went circling, like a multitude of sounds.
The budding groves seemed eager to urge on
The steps of June; as if their various hues
Were only hindrances that stood between
Them and their object: but, meanwhile, prevailed
Such an entire contentment in the air
That every naked ash, and tardy tree
Yet leafless, showed as if the countenance
With which it looked on this delightful day
Were native to the summer.—Up the brook
I roamed in the confusion of my heart,
Alive to all things and forgetting all.
At length I to a sudden turning came
In this continuous glen, where down a rock
The Stream, so ardent in its course before,
Sent forth such sallies of glad sound, that all

> Which I till then had heard, appeared the voice
> Of common pleasure: beast, and bird, the lamb,
> The shepherd's dog, the linnet and the thrush
> Vied with this waterfall, and made a song,
> Which, while I listened, seemed like the wild growth,
> Or like some natural produce of the air,
> That could not cease to be. Green leaves were here;
> But 'twas the foliage of the rocks—the birch,
> The yew, the holly, and the bright green thorn,
> With hanging islands of resplendent furze:
> And, on a summit, distant a short space,
> By any who should look beyond the dell,
> A single mountain cottage might be seen.
> I gazed and gazed, and to myself I said,
> "Our thoughts at least are ours; and this wild nook,
> My Emma, I will dedicate to thee."
> Soon did the spot become my other home,
> My dwelling, and my out-of-doors abode.
> And, of the Shepherds who have seen me there,
> To whom I sometimes in our idle talk
> Have told this fancy, two or three, perhaps,
> Years after we are gone and in our graves,
> When they have cause to speak of this wild place,
> May call it by the name of EMMA'S DELL.

This was the joy of all things in spring, when even we cannot help being happy, but there was also a fullness of delight in accomplished summer; and of fruitage and harvest in autumn; and of keen clearness of air and light, of the sleeping seeds dreaming of the world to come, in winter; which fullness of delight to the poet's soul filled the whole world of Nature through the changing year; the incessant steady praise of God from day to day. This made the heart of Nature beat with joy for ever. Sorrow and storm might come upon her, wasting, earthquake, decay, but these were but the ebbing of life and joy to rise into floodtide of happiness again. They were not death, but the trans-

ference of life into new forms. And when Nature felt herself as a whole, what she felt was, as she balanced her pain and pleasure, a quiet happiness in her life, delight that was sweeter than gaiety. Therefore, thought Wordsworth, she speaks to us more fully, more variously, more wisely, more in harmony with our chequered life, than if she always had the jocund life of spring. Her summer, autumn, winter, have another pleasure, an inward happiness in thought. They bring also their message to our hearts, their reproof of our sorrow, their hope in our despondency.

It was easy for Wordsworth to pass from this untempestuous joy into another element which he found in the life of Nature, the element of peace. Deep calm, he thought, was at her heart, the quietude of duty, the calm of Grasmere lake when all the hills and fields lay asleep in the still waters, "the sleep that is among the lonely hills," the flowers at rest in the windless day, the stars that breathe not with, but are above, the storm, the motionless clouds, the sun sinking down in its tranquillity, the stillness of the noonday woods, the soft murmur of the stream—these sent " their own deep quiet to restore our heart "—and, indeed, our troubled life knows well how true the poet saw, when he chose this element in Nature to run, like a full and silent river, through all his poetry.

Moreover, in the high realm of thought, philosophy did not disdain, he believed, this conception of peace in Nature. Wordsworth knew of the storms that vex the calm of Nature, of the work of her violent forces, of the incessant waste in the upper glens of the mountains, of the fury of the sea and the flooded streams; and he recorded it, but yet, beneath the outward rage

of the elements, he knew that order ruled, that the quiet of wisdom filled the movement of all things, that in the ultimate idea of the universe there was the calm of the unbroken law:

> Central peace subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation.

So he said, and his thought of the tranquil Being in the centre of each thing, organic or inorganic, remained, spite of all Nature's tempests, undisturbed.

It was a great thought to secure for us, and to express in a hundred poems. And no thought of Wordsworth's has done more for us in this noisy world than this. "Blessed are the peacemakers," may well be said of him. Of such is the Kingdom of Poetry.

There was yet another element in the life of Nature which filled the poetry of Wordsworth. It was the intercommunion of all things in Nature with one another, their tender association in friendship and love, their self-sacrifice in mutual loving-kindness. And this view of his was founded on the conviction that an infinite love flowed through the whole universe and was also its source. Every flower and cloud, every stream and hill, the stars and the mountain-tops, the trees and the winds that visited them, and the birds that lived among them, had each their own life and good, and rejoiced in communicating all they had of character and love to one another. The world was a world of active friendship.

This is perhaps the most beautiful of all the ideas which Wordsworth introduced into the poetry of Nature. It made the universe not only alive, but alive with love—love without jealousy or jar or envy—and

when we leave the stormy town and restore our heart in the lovely places of the earth, it is this idea which goes most with us, as we wander in the woods or underneath the stars, or by the mountain tarn. To us then, who love our Wordsworth, everything is speaking in sweet communion, all things are in love, each one with the other.

He varies this thought from poem to poem. The waves of the lake are brothers; the daffodils dance together; the linnet and the sunshine and the leaves of the tree entertain one another; the brook talks with every flower it passes; the mountains converse across their valleys; the clouds play, through their shadows, with the hills; the stars love to rest on the ridge of Helvellyn, the meteors make of the great eminence, that parleys the last with the setting sun, their favourite haunt, as if even these wild bodies had their special love; and man receives in hours when he is attuned to Nature's grace and love, love from her, and gives back to her his own affection. Love, now a universal birth,

> From heart to heart is stealing,
> From earth to man, from man to earth:
> It is the hour of feeling.

And not only at those quiet times when there is a blessing in the air

> Which seems a sense of joy to yield
> To the bare trees and mountains bare
> And grass in the green field,

but also when the storm is high, and when the storm has passed. There is a passage in the "Excursion" where the Solitary speaks of the two brother peaks which overhang the glen, which records this intercom-

munion of natural things, their speech and their reply, their wild pleasure with one another, how they are loved and love, and how proud the far stars and the great sun are to share in this intercommunion:

> These lusty twins, exclaimed our host; if here
> It were your lot to dwell, would soon become
> Your prized companions. Many are the notes
> Which, in his tuneful course, the wind draws forth
> From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths and dashing shores;
> And well those lofty brethren bear their part
> In the wild concert.

That is enough to mark the point. It is easy to pursue this track through the poems of Wordsworth. Even when age had lessened his power, he walked with ease along this path. But when he was young and bold, and had the animation of birds in spring, it filled his walks on his favourite hills and by the rippling murmur of the streams from field to field, with joy unspeakable, and love which could not refrain from song. He too, among the many presences and motions of the earth and sky alternating joy and love, became himself a presence and a motion among them, received and returned their energies and love, rejoiced with them, lived in the universe and the universe in him.

He has taught us, in our life with Nature, to feel the same high feeling, and we owe him therefore endless gratitude. The joy, the peace, the love, which Wordsworth felt in Nature were not, however, in his conception, the same as our joy, peace and love. They are similar to ours but not identical. What Nature felt, as he thought, was not imputed by him to Nature, was not the projecting of himself into Nature, as other poets have imagined. There was a vital difference between

man and Nature, and this he laid down with great and careful clearness. Nature and man were two separate beings, distinguishable always the one from the other. The poet does not make this or that mood in Nature by imagination; it is Nature who communicates, like a person, her mood to the poet. The birds do not sing gaily or sorrowfully because the poet happens to be sad or happy; they sing their own pain or pleasure:

> The birds around me hopped and played;
> Their thoughts I cannot measure.

But he is certain that they have their own feeling:

> For the least motion that they made,
> It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The flowers had each its own enjoyment in the air, not his:

> It is my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes.

We must grasp, when we read Wordsworth, this conception of his, if we would read him rightly, this separate life of Nature and man which enables a reciprocal action to take place between them. We do not receive from Nature what we give to her, "her life the eddying of her living soul," as Coleridge thought; we give, and then receive back from her, something wholly different. It is not the reflection of ourselves which Nature gives us; it is the friendship of another life than ours.

It is this delight in something different from himself which Wordsworth receives with joy and gratitude, this absence of himself in his conception of Nature, which makes his poetry about her so fresh, so happy, so

like the morning air, so full of gratitude. He has no thought of himself as he feels the beauty, joy and life of things. No words of his do the season or the mountains wrong, spoil the joy of the spring, make the flowers sad with his sadness, impute his passion to the song of the lark. He is content to receive from Nature and to be blest in receiving. Therefore, the impression of quiet or rapture or love comes freshly out of the heart of Nature to his heart; and he forgets himself in the delight of it all. Therefore he could receive infinite teaching, healing, splendour of thought, imaginations calm and fair, freedom from melancholy, joy, peace and love in his own heart from the world around him. Nothing in him interfered with Nature's action on him. She spoke to him, and he listened to her song. It were well indeed if we could imitate his mind and mood in this; and when he filled his poetry with this imagination, he did more for us, if we would follow him, than all the philosophers have done.

Yet he himself, so important did he think this idea of a separate life in Nature and in man, reduced it to a philosophic conception. It was not enough to feel it. He went on to enshrine it in plain terms. And he did this quite early in his career, in 1800, not long after he took up his dwelling in Grasmere. It forms the closing lines of the "Recluse," which describes his arrival at this quiet valley, and the youthful rapture which filled his soul.

When he pictures Beauty, Paradise, the Elysian Fields, images of all the ideal dreams of men, he cries that they are everywhere, to the sensitive heart. They lie before us day by day, they are made by the marriage of the life in Nature with the life in man.

These two lives are different, but they differ for the purpose of union, as man differs from woman. And, for that end, there is between them a pre-ordained fitness which enables them to mingle. And, in their mingling, there is Creation. With blended might, they weave together something different from both—and this, to him, was poetry. He does not say that, but had he pursued his thought to its conclusion he would have said it. Here are the lines:

> For the discerning intellect of Man,
> When wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion, shall find these
> A simple produce of the common day.
> I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
> Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
> Of this great consummation:—and, by words
> Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
> Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
> How exquisitely the individual Mind
> (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
> Of the whole species) to the external World
> Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
> Theme this but little heard of among men—
> The external World is fitted to the Mind:
> And the creation (by no lower name
> Can it be called) which they with blended might
> Accomplish:—this is our high argument.
>
> * * * *
>
> Descend, prophetic Spirit! that inspir'st
> The human Soul of universal earth,
> Dreaming on things to come; and dost possess
> A metropolitan temple in the hearts
> Of mighty Poets; upon me bestow
> A gift of genuine insight; that my Song
> With starlike virtue in its place may shine,
> Shedding benignant influence, and secure

Itself from all malevolent effect
Of those mutations that extend their sway
Throughout the nether sphere!—And if with this
I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
Contemplating; and who, and what he was—
The transitory Being that beheld
This Vision;—when and where, and how he lived;
Be not this labour useless. If such theme
May sort with highest objects, then—dread Power!
Whose gracious favour is the primal source
Of all illumination—may my Life
Express the image of a better time,
More wise desires, and simpler manners;—nurse
My Heart in genuine freedom:—all pure thoughts
Be with me;—so shall thy unfailing love
Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end!

This sketch of the marriage of the mind of man with the external world is filled up in various ways throughout the whole body of the poems. To reveal this unity, to urge us to accomplish it in ourselves, was one of the special works of poetry.

"Poetry," he says, "is the image of man and Nature. The poet considers man and the objects around him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure." The life in the soul of man seized and embraced the life in the soul of Nature, and in the passion of the embrace doubled his own life and doubled the life in Nature, till all the world and the individual man vibrated with the passion of a universal life. This sensation and the emotion of the spirit which followed it, could be produced by the sight of a single flower, a drift of cloud, a momentary sound of water—or by a vast landscape, or the starry sky, or the breathing of the breast of

Ocean. Greatness or smallness mattered not. Life was in the whole and in the parts, universal yet individual life.

That was the infinite world of living Being in which Wordsworth lived, and there is nothing like it in any other poet, save perhaps, but with inferior and unequal power, in Shelley. It is no wonder that when the conception first seized him, he could not contain himself for joy; no wonder that he made a new world in poetry; no wonder that, filled with this prolific conception and borne upon its wings he was content to live in poverty and prophecy. He possessed himself, and in himself he possessed the universe. And all to him was high and thrilling Life.

It is well to have an intellectual conception like this along with our emotion, when we live with Nature. It is like the strong bones of the body on which the beauty of the flesh is built. It gives a centre of thought to feeling, and mingles them into creation, definite and clear creation. And it realises for us in a shape which we can use, the play of the imagination with Nature, the truth of which we are likely to doubt, when we have no clear thought to which to refer the interweaving of life which we imagine. It is our own experience he shapes into this conception. We vaguely ask whether Nature has no desire to unite herself to us. The animals, we think, wish to communicate with us; and what we feel they wish, we often think is the wish also of the trees and streams, the flowers and the mountains. There are times when we feel that everything longs to give us pleasure, to tell us of its life, to sing to us, to play with us, to bring consolation.

And we, in turn, are possessed, in solitary hours, by

the same desire of union with Nature. A secret and deep passion it is, and its highest hours are consecrated and consecrate us. In them the harmonious marriage of our soul to Nature is accomplished, and though the passion is not human, it tells us of that in us which will be fully added hereafter to our humanity—part of that more finished life which is to be.

These vague imaginations Wordsworth gave form, clear form to in his philosophic conception. He enabled us to realise them in thought, and the thought brought with it its own impassionating emotion. It was a passion so deep in the soul of Wordsworth that he breathed its air all his life long. He had the power to express it, and even in his philosophical and political poems, when poetry ran away from him, he rushes back into the life of song, when this passion recurs, and it is always recurring.

It was the depth of this passion which was one of the strong sources of his poetic power. What the poet sees Nature do in the universe with all her forms, he does himself with ideas, feelings and words. His mind works as Nature works. He sends forth power from himself which changes, moulds, abstracts and endows with life the objects of sense and the thoughts of others; which creates new existences out of the impressions it receives; which builds up great and new forms of Thought and Act out of the least suggestion; which, always alive to the outward, receives from it impulses, ideas, which are caught as they pass and mastered into form. The poet acts like Nature. His art is a similar art to that which Nature exercises; and is exercised in a similar way. In the realm of this thought, which was a conclusion from his theory, Wordsworth, as a poet,

felt every impression he received over again in a different way from that in which he felt it at first. He felt the thought the impression made, not only in himself, but over again as a part of Nature. It was not he only that composed it into verse, but Nature herself with him. And as he felt it thus, it seemed to him that he was himself a power of Nature, that his poems were works of Nature, that all poets were impersonations of Nature, and worked their work hand in hand and heart in heart with her. This was a pregnant thought, and it is suggested again and again in his poems. But once he gave it full utterance. It is not only glittering verse the youth educated by Nature sees in the work of the great masters of song. He sees in them great Nature herself. Their words are viewless winds that visionary power attends; darkness and the host of shadowy things are in their poetry, and the infinite beauty of light, and the forms it reveals. In their poetry, as in Nature, all things in the universe of spirit weave and unweave, change from shade to sunlight, from sun to shade. Veiled or clear, the whole world is shown, newly created by the poet, as Nature every morning shows it, fresh, different but a-brim with life.

Here, with the noble lines in which he embodies it, I close this chapter.

> This only let me add
> From heart experience, and in the humblest sense
> Of modesty—that he who, in his youth,
> A daily wanderer among woods and fields,
> With living Nature hath been intimate,
> Not only in that raw unpractised time
> Is stirred to ecstasy, as others are,
> By glittering verse; but further, doth receive
> In measure dealt out only to himself,

WORDSWORTH, THE POET OF NATURE

Knowledge and increase of enduring joy
From the great Nature that exists in works
Of mighty Poets. Visionary power
Attends the motions of the viewless winds,
Embodied in the mystery of words:
There darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things work endless changes—there,
As in a mansion like their proper home,
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine,
And, through the turnings intricate of verse,
Present themselves as objects recognised
In flashes, and with glory not their own.

CHAPTER VIII

WORDSWORTH; SHELLEY; BYRON

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was born at Cockermouth on 7th April, 1770, in the midst of the Lake Country he loved so well and so faithfully painted in his verse. He lived among its scenery from childhood to old age, and its peculiar spirit penetrated, with an impelling vitality, the whole body of his poetry. The spirit of Nature that fills the work of Wordsworth is of one type, and its consistent prevalence binds that work into a unity of its own. Even the first volume of the "Lyrical Ballads," written in Somersetshire, is deeply influenced by the Lake landscape amidst which he spent his youth. Even among the Alps the impressions he records are coloured by the dominant tone of the North-country landscape.

This unity of feeling, derived from one type of scenery, is one of the living interests of his poetry; and it was supported by a philosophic conception of Nature which was interwoven with it, and which also remained constant to the close of his life. These two elements took various forms, as year succeeded year, but every new form was contained in their inner unity. The organ developed new functions, but itself remained the same. All he saw and felt and heard

> was but a stream
> That flowed into a kindred stream—a gale
> Confederate with the current of the soul.

There was a power in this man, so mastered was his soul by a passion for unity, to make every impression a servant of the main aim his art desired.

The roots of this oneness of feeling with regard to nature and of the philosophic conception of Nature he fitted to it, were set, unconsciously to himself, in his boyhood; and he describes, with retrospective pleasure, how, through all his school life at Hawkshead, they intertwined themselves into the ground of his soul. In 1787 he went to Cambridge, and this change of life only sent him back to feel, with renewed power, this interpenetration of himself with the wild Nature of his home.

But he did not remain absorbed in this alone. In 1791 he left Cambridge and voyaged on the Continent. He was then caught up into the first uplifted joy of the French Revolution, and a new element was added to his nature—the impassionating element of humanity. The forceful impression of its vastness had already in London come upon him; the universal community of its joys, sorrows and hopes, of its conscience and affections, had settled into his soul in the great city. We may imagine, but scarcely realise, how, with this new and huge conception in his soul, it was widened, deepened, multiplied, intensified, varied and set on fire by his stay in France, where the whole of humanity was working like a sea. There humanity became as great a power in his soul as Nature had been. He lived for a year in that huge hurricane of human passion and barely escaped with his life to England. But he carried with him the ideas of the Revolution, and, owing partly to them and partly to the love he had of the simple manhood of the shepherds and statesmen among

whom he was born and educated, and of whom indeed he was always one, he kept close to those original and simple elements of human nature which are common to all; recorded them in verse, and never, even when he became old and conservative, lost the power of receiving from them his best and strongest impressions.

This unity of feeling with regard to man is also one of the vital interests of his poetry; and its growth and development were throughout conterminous with his feeling for Nature.

In 1793 he published his first volume of poems, but they are not remarkable, or at least their originality is so far behind that of his second volume, that they scarcely count in any estimate we may make of him. In London, where he was for a time, afterwards in Dorsetshire, he grew steadily in inward and silent power; and when he came to Alfoxden in the Quantocks of Somersetshire, he was ready for the impulse he received from the friendship of Coleridge. That friendship kindled all the materials, which had been accumulated in his soul, into flame; impelled into form all the ideas he had conceived with regard to the method and the province of poetry; and he broke into novel creation. The result was the publication in 1798 of the first volume of the "Lyrical Ballads." After a winter in Germany, at Goslar, he returned, like the dove to the Ark, to his Northern country, where his heart was at home; settled down at Grasmere to a simple life of poverty and production; resolved on making the writing of poetry the art of his whole life; published the second volume of the "Lyrical Ballads" in 1800, completed the "Prelude" in 1805, published two more volumes of poetry in 1807, and

sent forth the "Excursion" in 1814. The rest of his life was lived in the same country, in consistent unworldliness, retaining, to the very end, his enjoyment of Nature;[1] and when he was not influenced by the natural conservatism which grows with regard to their own country, like moss on an old apple tree, around so many Englishmen as they get old, he was almost as vivid in his sympathies for liberty and fraternity as he had been when he was young. Some of his latest poems were written in behalf of the struggle for freedom in Italy. He has left us an immortal name, and a work which will not die as long as the human heart loves its kind, as long as it is moved by the beauty of the world, and the spirit that abides in both. Take him for all in all, there is no poet since Milton whose life-work has so great a range of weight and influence, whose spirit will endure so steadily, and mould so firmly and so tenderly the lives of men. And though as a poet and artist he is inferior to Milton; as a power in the general heart of man, he is greater than Milton. Of course, in saying this, I am making no comparison between Milton and Wordsworth as between poet and poet. Milton is in the first class, among the imperial poets of the world, Wordsworth is nearer to our hearts than Milton, closer to our common humanity. We are, with Milton, among the mountainous realms of human nature. But with Wordsworth, we walk at ease among its lowly vales, in its sweet and common meadows where the children play and lovers walk and men and women sorrow and endure and rejoice. Again, Milton was the

[1] See the "Verses to the Clouds" written on the footroad between Rydal and Grasmere in 1842, when he was 72 years old. See also "Airey Force Valley."

last of a great race of poets and the last representative of a great manner, but Wordsworth is the foremost of a new race of poets; and the first representative of a great and novel manner in poetry. It is true, as I have said, that Cowper, in 1785, in the "Task," Crabbe in the "Village" in 1783, and Burns in his earliest poems of 1786, led poetry to tell of the rural life, the sorrows, love and natural joys of the poor; and found in the pathetic and passionate description of common human nature their best and most vital subject. But Burns was Scottish, not English, and Cowper and Crabbe wrote partly in the atmosphere of the past; in its sad sunset, rather than in the dawn of a new life of song. They have no feeling of exultation such as belongs to the morning of a fresh day—no rapture such as filled Wordsworth's early work. Their methods also are not new. They felt, but they did not feel enough to formulate the poetry of human nature in its simplicity. It would have been wholly impossible for either of them to write the "Ancient Mariner" or the "Highland Girl." Moreover, the old religious ideas, in a miserable and maddening form, fettered the genius of Cowper, and the social ideas of the age before the Revolution embarrassed Crabbe. An atmosphere of thought and feeling about man which was in the last stage of decay still clung around their work and saddened it. But Wordsworth wrote of the new birth of fresh and exalting conceptions. He was clothed in the sunlight of the morning, but they bore in half of their poetry the robes of late and rainy evening, the night of which was close at hand.

"The Lyrical Ballads" began a new world. The last school of lyrical poetry in England was that of

Gray and Collins, and the amount of its work was small. Different from the school of Dryden and Pope, influenced by many of the new ideas, it was yet of its century; contemplative of humanity and of Nature from without, not feeling them from within; not simple, but having the conventionality of a scholar's work, not impulsive, not prophetic. With the strange exception of Blake, who was an Elizabethan child born out of due time, all the other lesser poets continued the method and spirit of Gray. At last, and as sudden as a spring that bursts through a mountain side, Burns took the world back in a moment to simple passion, and Wordsworth to simple humanity. Burns, considering his poetic descent, is much more easily accounted for than Wordsworth, much less unexpected, less original in this return to Nature. The Scottish poetry before Burns struck much the same note which he struck. His work was not strange to those who had listened to Allan Ramsay and to Ferguson. His love of Nature had been felt by the Scottish poets from the time of James I. of Scotland. His poetry, then, was not so much a return to Nature, as the expansion, with a fresher and more passionate note, of a poetry which in Scotland had always been unconventional, both in its treatment of man and Nature. But Wordsworth, however one may trace the germs he developed back to dim origins, is much more amazing a phenomenon than Burns. At one leap, at the age of twenty-eight, he published a tiny book which advanced poetry in England a hundred years, which did for his art almost exactly that which Giotto did for painting—bringing it into harmony with natural truth, and expressing the truth with passionate simplicity and faith. No

change can be greater than that which divides the work of Gray from the work of Wordsworth, the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" from poems like "Simon Lee," even from poems like the "Lines written on the Wye near Tintern Abbey." Listen to this of Gray's. He has described the insect youth upon the wing:

> To Contemplation's sober eye
> Such is the race of man;
> And they that creep, and they that fly
> Shall end where they began.
> Alike the busy and the gay
> But flutter through life's little day,
> In Fortune's varying colours drest;
> Brushed by the hand of rough Mischance,
> Or chilled by age, their airy dance
> They leave, in dust to rest.

How scholarly, how contemplative, how unimpassioned! The sadness in it is the sadness of the evening of life among graves—of the evening of one school of poetry in its lovely sunset! Then take these lines of Wordsworth, also from a poem of quiet thinking:

> For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

How passionate, how personal, how direct, how full! It is the thought of one who is thinking new things, not about what has already been thought; the emotion of one who feels born into a new world, not of one musing on a world old and sad in its decay. It is the springtide of poetry, with the whole of a summer before it, which we feel in the verse! No winter there, not even autumn.

Take another example. The man near whose grave Gray thought out his Elegy was one whom melancholy had marked for her own, and Gray wrought round his fate the feelings of one who had lived among books, and saw his world through books.

> There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
> That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
> His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
> And pore upon the brook that babbles by.
>
> Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
> Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove;
> Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,
> Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

Into what a different world are we plunged at once by Wordsworth in 1798!

> Books—'tis a dull and endless strife:
> Come hear the woodland linnet,
> How sweet his music—on my life,
> There's more of wisdom in it!
>
> And hark how blithe the throstle sings!
> He, too, is no mean preacher;
> Come forth into the light of things,
> Let Nature be your teacher. . . .
>
> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.

There we breathe the morning air as much as in Gray we breathe the evening. This was the creation of another universe. And, as Wordsworth, in his prophetic way, felt within himself the powers of this reborn life of song, he must have sung within his heart—and no wonder that the joy of it made him indifferent to praise or blame—almost the same thing which he sang when France made mankind alive again with youth.

> Before him shone a glorious world—
> Fresh as a banner bright, unfurled.

This, then, is the first glory of Wordsworth. He created a new world. What that world was it is difficult to speak of briefly, for it includes all that is simple and universal in Nature and humanity. At present, our chief task must be to isolate certain differences in his work which distinguish him from other poets. I have already sufficiently distinguished him from the poets who preceded him. I will now distinguish him from two of the poets who followed him. It will bring out certain elements in him with clearness to contrast him at some special points with Shelley and Byron, both of whom were touched, though not so nearly as he was, by the impulse of the ideas of the Revolution.

The critical blame which denies Shelley his lofty place among the choir of those who sing, is petulant prejudice, but that is not to say that he sits side by side with Wordsworth in the ranks. Wordsworth is above him on the whole—not altogether. Shelley is more purely lyrical, more a singing creature than Wordsworth. His was the nature of the wild indweller of the sky who is born to sing and die in the upper airs; but Wordsworth has lyrics of the earth; his song is

truer, simpler; and men and women and children, so far as they love our common human world, will love him the best. Shelley stood apart from our natural daily life; and when he sang of men, he sang of them as he hoped they would be rather than as they are. His art expressed only the ideal, not the ideal and the actual. He failed even in expressing the ideal with sufficient force, because he had not founded it securely enough upon the real life of man. He preached the spiritual, but he did not preach it as growing out of the natural. But Wordsworth's poetry answered to that phrase of St. Paul's: "First the natural, then that which is spiritual."

When Shelley's subject matter was the hopes and aims of humanity, his work, though men called it Utopian, was serious; but it was concerned wholly with the future. On the other hand, when his song concerned himself and his interest in the present, he did not live upon the earth at all; nor did he care for the established facts of life. On the contrary, he hated them and desired to have nothing to do with them. His own skylark is his type. He is thinking of himself when he writes:

> Like a poet hidden
> In the light of thought,
> Singing hymns unbidden,
> Till the world is wrought
> To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.

That is Shelley—wishing, claiming, to influence mankind, but without going in and out among them—singing hymns that no one asked for, calling men to feel hopes and fears concerning the future of which as yet they know nothing.

When he is prophesying for man, he is still somewhat apart from man, as apart as Prospero is placed by his art before he drowns his book. When he sings a lyric song, such a song as "On a poet's lips I slept," or his "Echo Song," he is like Ariel—unhuman—yet touched from far with a sense of the possibility of sympathy with man. When Ariel tells Prospero of the grief and distraction of the King and his followers, he declares that if Prospero saw them his affections would become tender.

> Dost thou think so, spirit?
> Mine would, sir, were I human.

That is Shelley's spirit at times.

Wordsworth's position, Wordsworth's joy and love, Wordsworth's art were all set over against this position of Shelley's. His skylark has its "privacy of glorious light," but returns to his nest upon the dewy ground, "those quivering limbs composed, that music still." Wordsworth soared and sang, but he never lost touch of humanity; and his sweetest and purest work was work which made music around the nests where men and women and children lived and loved. And that suits us in the end the best. We have our time with Shelley, if we are of his temper; and then the older we grow, the dearer to us, if we are wise, is our Mother Earth and our Brother Man. Even their pain, since it is softening, if we bear it nobly and conquer it humbly, is better while we are here than the ecstacy of homelessness, even though it be the homelessness of the uncreated Light. Wordsworth lived with men, and his purpose was to bless them, in the midst of their present life, with comfort and with joy. "I wish," he says, "to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight,

making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see and think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." He has done that healing and exalting work. Shelley could not have done that, but he would have praised its being done. And this poetic work of Wordsworth, the art of it being assumed, is more enduring and more universal than Shelley's. "The Old Seed-Gatherer" is more to us than "Prince Athanase"; the "Recluse" than "Alastor"; the "Prelude," though both are poems on human liberty, than the "Revolt of Islam"; the "Ode to Duty" more fitted for us than the "Hymn to the Spirit of Nature." Take the two last verses of each poem. We feel with both; but the one is a passing phase into which we drift and out of which we fly; and the other is made of a cloth of gold, which we may use for the whole of life and never find it tarnish. Here is Shelley:

Fair are others; none beholds thee,
But thy voice sounds low and tender
Like the fairest, for it folds thee
From the sight, that liquid splendour,
And all feel, yet see thee never,
As I feel now, lost for ever.

Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest,
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness,
Till they fail, as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost—yet unbewailing.

Now for Wordsworth:

Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong
And the most ancient Heavens, through Thee, are
fresh and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power!
I call Thee; I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour
O! let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give:
And in the light of Truth thy Bondman let me live.

We do well to choose that rather than to be "dizzy, lost—yet unbewailing." Yet can anything be more childish, as criticism, than to exclude Shelley from the poets who have written about human life and spoken to it comfort and exaltation, because he has not come so close to its duties and common life as Wordsworth? The passing phases which Shelley wrote of are never written of by Wordsworth, yet they are often those portions of our inner life which we remember most constantly and feel most deeply. They ravish us with joy, and in them we touch the skirts of the uncreated beauty. We could not always live in them, but we do need their expression. And in their expression Shelley soars far above Wordsworth. But we want Wordsworth more because what he glorifies is our daily love and duty—our everyday existence.

Yes, it is a good thing to be led by Shelley to enjoy our own dreams, to touch the remote and delicate pleasures of beauty, to feel the far-off joys of infinite dreams of good, of fine regrets; to enter into the subtle spiritual world of Nature where every dewdrop has its own indweller, and every cloud its own spirit which

builds and unbuilds it again. And men are getting very old when they are no longer grateful to him for expressing this silken-woven world of phantasy and love within us. Nevertheless, it is better to be brought by Wordsworth to see the beautiful in the common world; to be filled with tenderness for the men and women with whom we live; to be taught to conquer regrets; to take things that are with a noble patience; to get the good out of the battle; to secure our victory and peace; and when we are led into Nature, to be led into her actual world and yet to feel behind it and behind ourselves, so that Nature and we are knit together in harmony, there is one thinking Spirit, one Wisdom, one Power and one Love. Shelley belongs to our youth and our inexperience, to our changing love and our flitting metaphysic; to the days when Nature is more to us than man or woman; to the hours when we love and sorrow and do not know what love and sorrow mean—but Wordsworth belongs to grave and conscious life; and the more tolerant and wise we become, without loss, but with gain, of love, the more we shall turn to Wordsworth and make him the companion of our imaginative life, the ministrant of our happiness, the revealer to us of the common heart of man and of the secret communion of love and joy which abides in Nature.

Nevertheless, I must not be mistaken. When I speak of Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature, of his high teaching to the heart and of his power over the moral soul, I do not mean that these are the things for which we love him most, or that they make him a poet. His philosophy of Nature was in itself nothing particular; his lofty morality was the morality of a thousand

other teachers. Both of them were a good foundation for work. Felt through his poetry, and influencing it indirectly, they strengthened it.

But they are not necessarily poetic. In fact, Wordsworth is a poet in spite of them, not because of them. That which we most love him for, that which speaks to our soul out of his verse, is that which makes him an artist. It is his passionate joy in what is beautiful, his vital feeling of all that is tender, his capacity for losing himself in Nature and in man, his imagination, his power of penetrating into the heart of that concerning which he writes; and then, to top all, he has the creative, forming faculty by which he can shape his subject into words which seem divine; so fitted are they, by placing and by melody, to make us feel that which he has conceived and felt. This is the faculty of all great artists. And it is because he is an artist, and not because he is a moralist and philosopher, that men love Wordsworth. Take as an illustration "Stepping Westward." As the girl asked him: "What, are you stepping westward?" Wordsworth felt the infinite in the question—westward for ever—beyond the world and its flaming walls. That sense of boundless onward movement was the imaginative emotion in the poet's soul, and it is felt as a transport throughout the poem. Yet Wordsworth binds it up with the girl, and then the girl with the lake, till she and the landscape and the infinite region where imagination wanders for ever are woven together. This is the high poetic power. Now hear how musical, how simple, how much his own is the form in which the whole is cast:

> The voice was soft, and she who spake
> Was walking by her native lake.

The salutation had to me
The very sound of courtesy:
Its power was felt—and while my eye
Was fixed upon the glowing sky,
The echo of the voice enwrought
A human sweetness with the thought
Of travelling through the world that lay
Before me in my endless way.

So far for Wordsworth, not compared with, but set over against Shelley. If, in turn, I set him over against Byron, other elements in him will appear in the contrast. I will only take one point—the point of literary power. Wordsworth never reached the audacious, the perhaps vulgar, power of Byron—not the power of a thinker, but the power of easy production, the power of flight, like that of a great bird which can in the midst of its motion to a goal take vast side-sweeps and return to its straight course without its wing flagging for a single moment, as, *e.g.*, in the fanciful episodes in "Don Juan"; nor could he, in his longer poems, support himself as Byron did, throughout, at the same level of power; that is, the pitch of the note, on which any one poem of Byron begins, does not lower itself, nor indeed often rise above itself. The level is rarely a high level, but Byron very rarely fell below it. This is a most interesting thing to note in an artist's work.

Wordsworth, on the contrary, is unequal. He often saunters in half prose, sometimes in full prose, sometimes, though this is uncommon, he shuffles limply along. He now and then writes childishly, but he does not write nonsense. His sentiment is often drawling, but it is never based on carelessness of thought. When it is dreary and dull it is from want of the power which

Byron possessed as a natural gift. Nevertheless, in two matters which belong to this contrast of literary "power" Wordsworth far excelled Byron. Byron's metrical form is often curiously bad. The ease of his power often deceived him into singing out of tune. Wordsworth's ear is, I think, always true; his form, when he is writing poetry, musically fits the thing he wishes to say. When he is pedestrian in his verse he is frankly so, and, I think, as I shall say hereafter, of set purpose. But when we are going with him in a steady gallop over a lofty subject, worthy of lofty verse, we are never pulled up short by some dead, prosaic line, by some gross metrical fault, or by some ungrammatical or illogical expression; as we frequently are when we read Byron. There is in Wordsworth an "austere purity of language," an instructive appropriateness of metre and words to his meaning, a weight in the words which doubles the force of the thoughts, and as Coleridge says, a "curious felicity of expression" all the more interesting because whenever it is most felicitous it is most individual, most Wordsworth himself. We remember the story Coleridge tells. When he heard the lines which describe a certain place, and how Wordsworth saw

> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
> Into the bosom of the steady lake,

he burst out: "Had I met these lines running wild in the deserts of Arabia, I should have instantly screamed out 'Wordsworth!'"

Here is another passage:

> The spot was made by Nature for herself.
> The travellers knew it not, and 'twill remain
> Unknown to them: but it is beautiful;

> And if a man should plant his cottage near,
> Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,
> And blend its waters with his daily meal,—
> He would so love it, that in his death hour
> Its image would survive among his thoughts.

This is absolute Wordsworth. Byron was never in all his life so individual. No, nor for one fleeting moment did he reach the artistic quality of that. With all his power, he had not these special qualities of the artist as Wordsworth had them. As to imaginative power, the power of seeing straight into the heart of the thing spoken of, the power of bringing into contact with its image, remote images which in their unlikeness are yet like, and which enhance the original picture—there is no comparison between Wordsworth and Byron, so much greater—so different by leagues of power—is Wordsworth than Byron. Take two examples of the former, in the case of stillness of act; the first, "The Butterfly":

> How motionless—not frozen seas
> More motionless!

the other, "The Old Leech-Gatherer":

> Motionless as a cloud the old man stood;
> That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
> And moveth altogether, if it move at all.

Yet again to bring all these things, the distinctive character, the imaginative power, the mingling of far-off yet related things, the sense of the universe beyond the poet and his subject, the return of the subject to the common earth, and the event from which the poem started, read "The Highland Girl":

> Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower
> Of beauty is thy earthly dower!
> Twice seven consenting years have shed
> Their utmost bounty on thy head:

And these grey rocks; this household lawn;
These trees, a veil just half withdrawn;
This fall of water, that doth make
A murmur near the silent lake;
This little bay; a quiet road
That holds in shelter thy abode;
In truth together do ye seem
Like something fashioned in a dream;
Such forms as from their covert peep
When earthly cares are laid asleep!
Yet, dream and vision as thou art,
I bless thee with a human heart:
God shield thee to thy latest years!
Thee neither know I nor thy peers;
And yet my eyes are filled with tears.

With earnest feeling I shall pray
For thee when I am far away:
For never saw I mien or face,
In which more plainly I could trace
Benignity and home-bred sense
Ripening in perfect innocence.
Here scattered like a random seed,
Remote from men, Thou dost not need
The embarrassed look of shy distress,
And maidenly shamefacedness:
Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear
The freedom of a Mountaineer:
A face with gladness overspread!
Soft smiles, by human kindness bred!
And seemliness complete, that sways
Thy courtesies, about thee plays;
With no restraint, but such as springs
From quick and eager visitings
Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
Of thy few words of English speech:
A bondage sweetly brooked, a strife
That gives thy gestures grace and life!
So have I, not unmoved in mind,
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind,
Thus beating up against the wind.

What hand but would a garland cull
For thee, who art so beautiful?
O happy pleasure! here to dwell
Beside thee in some heathy dell;
Adopt your homely ways, and dress,
A Shepherd, thou a Shepherdess!
But I could frame a wish for thee
More like a grave reality:
Thou art to me but as a wave
Of the wild sea; and I would have
Some claim upon thee, if I could,
Though but of common neighbourhood.
What joy to hear thee, and to see!
Thy elder Brother I would be,
Thy Father, anything to thee!

Now thanks to Heaven! that of its grace
Hath led me to this lonely place.
Joy have I had; and going hence
I bear away my recompense.
In spots like these it is we prize
Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes:
Then why should I be loth to stir?
I feel this place was made for her;
To give new pleasure like the past,
Continued long as life shall last.
Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,
Sweet Highland Girl, from thee to part;
For I, methinks, till I grow old,
As fair before me shall behold,
As I do now, the Cabin small,
The Lake, the Bay, the Waterfall;
And Thee, the Spirit of them all!

I have said that Wordsworth was unequal, that he lowered his note almost to prose. But he could soar when he liked, and did it without losing breath. When he chose to put forth his power, it was done with stately ease, and the higher he soared the more broad and almost majestic was the sweep of his wing. In Byron,

when he attempted the higher ranges of thought; in others, in Tennyson for example, when he passes into a thought-laden philosophy, we hear the straining note, we feel the exertion the poet has made. The mountain top is reached with effort; the words come with long breaths between. The original inspiration has, with Tennyson, been altered and re-altered till it has lost the charm and the power of momentariness. This is not the case with Wordsworth's grander song. The very irregularity of a poem like the "Excursion" is a proof of this. It is impossible that so clear a poetic nature as his, with Coleridge too as friend and critic, did not feel, was not as well aware as we, of the pedestrian stride of a good deal of the "Excursion"; and I think that he deliberately left these lines in that condition. He held, whether rightly or wrongly is not here the question, to momentariness, to spontaneity; that is, in this matter I now discuss, he allowed the subject to select as it were its own form in his mind, and then left the form it had first taken untouched; so that a matter of fact description should be done in matter of fact verse. The form would then fit the thing; it would be spontaneous. To work it up afterwards into high poetic form would be to lose fitness and to lose momentariness. I imagine that was his reason for leaving these dull passages—we may be sure he knew as well, and better than his critics, that they were dull prose, and there is a great deal to be said for his reason.

Well, with love of momentariness, with this dislike of alteration, with this work in fresco, if I may use that illustration, does Wordsworth get into the higher and sublimer regions of song? If so, and he keep his spontaneity, he will do so with an ever freshening impulse,

with effortless ease, and be greater than the poet who labours to attain that height.

Take, to illustrate this remark, the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." It has "thoughts and images in it too great" for the subject matter, as when he calls the child "Thou best Philosopher" etc., but no one denies its sublimity. Its philosophy is fantastic, but words do not fail the lofty fantasy. Was it laboriously conceived? No. It was written because he could not help it, straight out of his own passion; driven by as great a rush of feeling as Shelley was when he wrote the "Ode to the West Wind"; and my impression is, and there are good grounds for it, that the correction of the poem was merely nominal. Is it then laboured? Does Wordsworth breathe this sublimer air with difficulty? Every one feels its ease, the smoothness between the thought and the form. It is as unlike one of Tennyson's efforts as possible.

And we have an account from himself of its growth in his mind which supports all I have said. The lines composed at Tintern Abbey contain some of his noblest thoughts, thrilled through with imaginative passion, penetration and truth; and they soar into the upper airs of power and love. Yet they were composed with rushing ease, with rapid movement. They came and took their form at once, and the form needed no alteration and received none. "I began it," he says, "on leaving Tintern, and concluded it as I was entering Bristol in the evening. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol."

When I say he was driven to these lofty passages by as great a rush of feeling as drove Shelley into the

"Ode to the West Wind," I do not mean that he went with one flying rush from the lower grounds to the upper airs as Shelley did. There was a difference in the working of the inspiration, a difference which belongs to character.

When Wordsworth moved into this loftier region, he went upwards with a certain stately slowness, with a bridle upon his power; keeping himself back until he arrived at the point where he might open out all his thought and spread his wings for majestic flight. Every reader must have remarked the slow movement of "Tintern Abbey," and the ease, unbroken by any sudden transitions, with which he passes into the splendid passages of the poem. It was this quality in his character and his work, I may say in passing, that made him so fine a sonnet writer. There is a passage in the "Prelude" which illustrates what I have been saying. It illustrates this stately movement, and the statelier expansion when he soars into full expression and description. It illustrates it even in the thing described, which is the climb up Snowdon. He climbs slowly but does not lose his breath. Suddenly he is out of the mist, on the shoulder of the mountain, in the absolute light of the full moon and in full enjoyment of physical power. It is a picture of his way of poetic working and of the work itself. But the passage itself, which I shall quote, is also an illustration of the way in which his art wrought. It mounts slowly—and at last it rises—with absolute ease—into magnificent verse wedded to magnificent thought:

> It was a close, warm, breezeless summer night:
> Wan, dull, and glaring, with a dripping fog,
> Low-hung and thick, that covered all the sky;

But, undiscouraged, we began to climb
The mountain side. The mist soon girt us round,
And, after ordinary travellers' talk
With our conductor, pensively we sank
Each into commerce with his private thoughts.
Thus did we breast the ascent: . . .

. . . With forehead bent
Earthward, as if in opposition set
Against an enemy, I panted up
With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts.
Thus might we wear a midnight hour away,
Ascending at loose distance each from each,
And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band;
When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor was time given to ask or learn the cause,
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,
The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the main Atlantic, that appeared
To dwindle, and give up his majesty
Usurped upon, far as the sight could reach.

I turn, in conclusion, to another point in which Byron and Shelley may well be contrasted with Wordsworth for the purpose of bringing out a certain element in Wordsworth's work on which not enough has been said. That element is the passion of love. I have said, in my Introduction to "Poems from Shelley," in what Shelley's poetry of passion consisted. It was almost wholly ideal, in a world which has no reality, nothing

we can grasp. What passionate poetry Wordsworth wrote was concerned with the actual world. It would have been wholly impossible for him to have conceived the lines:

> One word is too often profaned
> For me to profane it,
> One feeling too falsely disdained
> For thee to disdain it.
> One hope is too like despair
> For prudence to smother,
> And pity from thee more dear
> Than that from another.
>
> I can give not what men call love,
> But wilt thou accept not
> The worship the heart lifts above
> And the heavens reject not,
> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow?

Compare with that, "She was a phantom of delight."

As to Byron's passionate poetry, it is chiefly concerned with phases of miserable or immoral love; with fierce hate, with violent passions in rebellion against destiny, having always this quality—that they weary after a time the reader, because, in action they exhaust themselves. Indeed they tired out Byron himself. Their outlines are not noble, nor simple, nor well drawn. The feelings represented do not touch all men, nor when they touch men do they endure. The desire of all who are involved in them is to get out of them as fast as possible when they have drunk deep of them. The bottom of the cup is always revolting.

But in Byron they are sometimes worse than they are in other poets. For he was made for higher things,

and while he felt and wrote of these passions, he felt so much what was ignoble in them that he was not lost in them. In his work the immoral passions have neither that intensity nor seriousness which are saving elements in them. He felt that, and he turned finally in "Don Juan" to mock at unlawful love, to treat it as a mere adventure, and only once to realise it in its sorrow and its beauty, in its natural impulse and its natural punishment.

Wordsworth has nothing of this. He reserved his passion for those channels where it flows legitimately, and deeply, not noisily and violently; and the flowing of it there is full and serious, broad and profound, with happy sunlight often on its surface, but often dark with thunderous fire and bitter rain. But always, and especially in love, it is such passion as all men and women may justly feel—the passion of the common lot of man, the sorrow and the joy which are, in love, between husband and wife, mother and child, brother and sister, friend and friend, between constant lovers who love honour more than love. Within those ancient and sacred limits lies Wordsworth's passionate poetry, but within them it is intense. Here are some examples of this passion. Take first the power of entering into the sorrow and love of animals. Burns had that power, but it was exercised somewhat on the outside of his subjects; the poet contemplates and moralises on their life. Coleridge in the "Ancient Mariner" is still on the outside of the birds and creatures of the sea. But Wordsworth, with that intensity of self-projection and self-forgetfulness which was his, goes clean into the very heart of the creatures of whom he speaks. It is not the ideal animal or bird such as Shelley would have

made; it is the very heart of the creature that lives before us, not humanised too much, but the primal, natural, necessary feelings of the beast or bird. To sing of the joy of the birds in spring, and to sing of the joy of other creatures is not so difficult. But it is difficult to grasp the tragic hour of supreme passion in an animal, and not to let the description pass beyond what an animal may feel, to keep it natural and yet to make it passionate. And he does this in "Hartleap Well." The stag has been hunted all day. It comes to die at a place it knows; dimly and dumbly feeling what we so often feel. In mortal agony it makes three inexpressible leaps from the summit of the hill to the fountain:

> What thoughts must through the creature's brain
> have past!
> Even from the topmost stone, upon the steep,
> Are but three bounds . . .
>
> For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race;
> And in my simple mind we cannot tell
> What cause the Hart might have to love this place,
> And come and make his deathbed near the well.
>
> Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank,
> Lulled by this fountain in the summer-tide,
> This water was perhaps the first he drank
> When he had wandered from his mother's side.
>
> In April, here beneath the flowering thorn,
> He heard the birds their morning carols sing;
> And he, perhaps, for aught we know, was born
> Not half a furlong from that self-same spring.

Then again, of all the forms of passionate love there is none that can compare in intensity, sacredness, depth, purity and antiquity to the love of motherhood. It

comes down to us, through all the animals, for uncounted millions of years. It is the earliest of all loves, the simplest and the subtlest alike, the most various in mood and the most at one with itself, the calmest and the most fierce—a very abiding place of contrasts—yet always the same. There is not a single English poet, not even Shakespeare, to be compared with Wordsworth as a realiser and painter of this passion. The cries of Constance over Arthur are as nothing in the realm of feeling to the "Affliction of Margaret," and that poem does not stand alone. One would think such a masterpiece could have no following, but it has. Take for example the few lines which record the sorrow of the mother of the boy of Egremont:

> If for a lover the lady wept,
> A solace she might borrow
> From death, and from the passion of death,—
> Old Wharf might heal her sorrow.
>
> She weeps not for the wedding-day
> Which was to be to-morrow:
> Her hope was a farther-looking hope,
> And hers is a mother's sorrow.
>
> He was a tree that stood alone,
> And proudly did its branches wave;
> And the root of this delightful tree
> Was in her husband's grave!

Again, for the stiller passion of a father's sorrow for a boy who had forgotten him in doing wrong, alone, and all his life without a hope, read "Michael."

> There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
> Would ove set the brain, or break the heart.

No one but one of the great poets could have written

that first line, as perfect in style as it is in pathetic power.

Then there is the poem that he writes to his wife—"She was a phantom of delight." It has no stormy passion in it, but it has long years of constant, unbroken, poetic and romantic love stirring in every line.

If we want a more disturbed and passionate note, yet with some of the simple and majestic outline the Greeks gave to sorrow, behind which stood the inevitableness of fate as the will of the great gods, we may turn to "Laodamia." If we would touch ill-fortuned love, so settled in its own monotony of pain that the changelessness of the world is an incessant irritation, we can read "'Tis said that some have died for love." "Here," said Wordsworth, "is one who lived, but whose whole life was a passionate cry."

If we would feel how brother feels for brother, sister for brother, how silent and deep may be the romance of companioned life, and the grief of loss, there are all the passages that tell of his own grief for his brother, and all those which speak of his sister. And if we desire to find Wordsworth touching a casual and a pure passion, with a hand as subtle and delicate and yet as warm as a ray of sunlight on a rose, there are the three poems to "Lucy." Above all, where she is lost in her grave:

> A slumber did my spirit seal,
> I had no human fears.
> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.
>
> No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees,
> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
> With rocks and stones and trees!

It is a sweet, true, faithful world in which we are when we walk in Wordsworth's garden of love. The flowers in it last, and they are our companions through life. They are always in soft shade or in pure sunlight. No bitterness belongs to them, and no satiety, and no decay. They keep their morning dew even in old age. And this was what he chose, this was the love song for him:

> I heard a stockdove sing or say
> His homely tale this very day;
> His voice was buried among trees,
> Yet to be come at by the breeze;
> He did not cease; but cooed—and cooed,
> And somewhat pensively he wooed:
> He sang of love with quiet blending,
> Slow to begin, and never ending;
> Of serious faith and inward glee;
> That was the song—the song for me!

CHAPTER IX

THE POETRY OF SHELLEY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY was born at Field Place, near Horsham, in Sussex, 4th August, 1792; and little did the world imagine, when he came into it, what a curious being it was going to play with for thirty years. The play was rough, and Shelley in his life got the worst of it. At least, so says the world. For my part, I do not think so. He took and got his own way, and with one exception, he was not so severely punished as those are who choose to have their way. My conclusion is that his way was, on the whole, a very right way, else he would have suffered more. He said all he wished to say, and when the world did not like it he turned his back upon the shores of England, the society of which did not suit him, and which would have mortally damaged him if he had fallen under its evil spell. He lived in a lovely country the life which was best for him, and died, before the weariness of life came upon him in the arms of the sea. There is no regret for him, and his fate; and he himself never complained at what men called his exile. He had chosen his path, and he accepted pleasantly all that went along with it. When the world abused him, he thought of the Love "whose smile kindles the universe," and of which he felt himself a living part. When a man is listening to the music of the spheres, he does not hear the frogs croaking.

Yet—it is said that he got the worser part. And certainly, the world did not spare him. He was bullied at

Eton; expelled from Oxford for atheism; abused and cast aside by his father; made a most unfortunate marriage with a girl of sixteen, of whose company he wearied, and whom he left; ran away with Mary Godwin, and was only able to marry her when he was overwhelmed with the news that his wife had slain herself; was deprived of his children by his first marriage, on legal, backed up by anti-atheistic grounds; lived wholly abroad, in exile, for four years, and was drowned by a *barrasco* in the Bay of Spezzia. It has even been supposed, and I know not if it be only a legend, that there was a crime hidden behind the veil of mist that Trelawny saw swallow up the sailing boat, and that she was run down by robber fishermen. If so, it seems as if Shelley was too wild of heart to die an ordinary death. Nothing indeed can be more romantic than his "obsequies." His remains, cast up by the sea, were burned by his friends on a pyre raised on the sea-beach, but the heart would not burn! The ashes were carried to Rome, and the Eternal City received them into its sacred bosom, and every year makes its violets spring around that deep nook in the Aurelian Wall, at the entrance of which the stone lies on which is carved *Cor Cordium*, Heart of Hearts. Only thirty years old! only the age at which most of us are beginning to feel the world and its life as our own, and yet his work was done, he had earned his immortality.

It were well to picture him, for of all the poets he had the most romantic air. I say "air," and not looks, for he does not seem to have been handsome. He was tall, and exceedingly quick in his movements, with a shy agility which made him seem to be ubiquitous. Fitted to this, like music to words, was an ever-changing

rapid play of expression, on a face, which, like his head, was small, irregular, white-skinned, delicately coloured, touched with feminine softness, sometimes with a light upon it men used to call angelic. There was a want of strength in the look, at times: a startled out-of-the-world glance, which was made more remarkable by the eyes, which were large and steady, glittering and prominent. "He has the eyes of a hare," a girl once said of him at Marlow. Over this very small head, wild, plenteous, tossed and waving dark-brown hair fell heavily. He blushed like a girl, and, in Italy, dressed like a boy. His gestures were abrupt, and he held his head thrown a little forward and the shoulders slightly lifted. He must often then have had an awkward look, but I fancy this was seldom seen because his motions were so quick. But not quicker than his tongue. He talked with vast swiftness, eagerness and joy; often in fiery argument, often, it seemed, in soliloquy, in a torrent of fantastic and delightful words. It was a pity that his voice was so strange. His friends found it "excruciating," "discordant," "a cracked soprano," "a high natural countertenor," "like a Lancashire accent"; but others, not so much his friends, thought its modulations fine, and his reading effective.

This was the man without, and the impression he leaves on us is that he was like a piece of wild Nature, a mountain tree growing as it willed, and moving to every wind, like the spirit who might dwell in such a tree, when it embodied itself to speak to men.

What he was within, many have tried to tell, but chiefly in vain. I will call himself into court. It is not to be said that a poet always in his poems describes himself truly, for he describes the mood in which he is

when he writes, and this would be specially the case with Shelley. But there is one passage where he deliberately paints himself, not in a short lyric like the "Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples," but in the midst of a long poem, and one not made about himself. And this passage, which occurs in the "Adonais," among descriptions of his brother poets, is so extraordinarily personal, so instinct with passion, so unreserved, that I have always felt a certain sense of shame in reading it, as if one had broken in upon the naked nature of the man. Yet it is so true to the temper of the poems, and so supported by other expressions in them—those casual expressions which make us often stop when reading any book and say: "That is the man himself"—that I am sure Shelley is speaking out of his very heart about his own nature. Here it is, and every word of it is important to the comprehension of Shelley:

'Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
A phantom among men; companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm
Whose thunder is its knell; he, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
Actæon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

A pard-like Spirit beautiful and swift—
A Love in desolation masked,—a Power
Girt round with weakness; it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow,—even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly; on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart:
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart.

Only one other man among the English poets has equalled the passionate and woeful personality of those lines, but in a wholly different manner. It is Cowper, and, strange to say, Cowper chooses the same image as Shelley; the solitary deer, stricken with the dart, bleeding to its death:

I was a stricken deer that left the herd,
Long since! With many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades,
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.

What an infinite, long-continued self-compassion in the words!

To return, however, to Shelley. That phrase I have quoted—"a phantom among men, companionless," —is the note which sounds all through "Alastor," which rules so many of the lovelier lyrics, which, alas, as he drew near to death, grew upon him, till he began to even lose the sympathy he felt with that humanity of the future for which he hoped and dreamed so eagerly in the "Prometheus Unbound." Even when he was writing "Hellas," even when, at the close of it, there broke from his lips the beautiful chorus of the return

of the Golden Age, he felt that he had lost touch with his ancient faith, and the last lines of the poem—a strange conclusion to the brightness of the beginning—

> The world is weary of the past,
> Oh, might it die, or rest, at last!—

are personal with the uncompanioned and phantom sorrow of his own heart. The poem he was writing when he died, composed as his little boat rocked on the azure swelling of the seas beneath the cliffs of Lerici, was the "Triumph of Life," not the conquest of life by men, but the enslaving and overthrow of all men by life. In its solemn and tragic verse, Shelley is indeed that which he calls himself

> Companionless
> As the last cloud of an expiring storm
> Whose thunder is its knell.

It is perhaps to this separation from mankind, which, as I said, grew upon him, that he owed his weakness of nature, or, at least, that increase of it which made him so conscious of its misery. Men who divide themselves from mankind divide themselves from the sources of power. No one can wrestle with the Hercules of what the poets call their fate—which is in fact the sensitiveness of their nature—unless they are in vital contact of love and faith, and of the action of these powers, with their fellow men. Antæus, when he touched the earth whence he was born, was strong. All poets when they touch humanity, which is the father and mother of their art, are powerful. When their fate—their solitary sensitive self—lifts them away from humanity, and grips them in the air, they are what

Shelley describes himself to be—"a dying lamp, a falling shower, a breaking billow," one who flies

> astray
> With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness;

One who can

> scarce uplift
> The weight of the superincumbent hour.

See how he dwells upon his weakness![1] Yet it was not only weakness of temperament caused by withdrawal into himself. It was also caused, as we see from this self-revelation, by feebleness of health. He calls himself "one frail form"; and frailty means here a body so delicate, so finely wrought that it affected into greater capacity for pain and joy the imaginative life within. The feebleness of the outward frame made all the passions more intense than they should have been; made them burn too quickly, exhausted them too soon. This is the meaning of the pansies overblown, the faded violets which crowned his head. But Shelley carries his thought farther. The overstimulated imagination and feelings acted, in their turn, upon the feeble body, and made it day by day more feeble, beat upon the nerves and made them tremble. The sword wore away the scabbard as much as the scabbard was too thin for the sword. Nothing can be more poetical than the way in which he describes this action of the passionate life within upon the body. The light spear, topped with the cypress cone, grown round with the

[1] *Cp.* "Ode to the West Wind"—

> "Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
> I fall upon the thorns of life; I bleed!
>
> A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
> One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud."

dark ivy, dripping with the forest's noonday dew—dew from those solitary glades where even the sun at its height could not pierce—

> Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
> Shook the weak hand that grasped it.

You will find this thought, and all it means concerning himself, expressed in many of the lyrics, and notably, though with a manlier and more excited note, at the end of the "Ode to the West Wind." You will find it, unless I am wrong in my conjecture, running all through the song which begins, "When the lamp is shattered the light in the dust lies dead," but most ethereally, most remotely expressed in this verse, where his sense of the frailty of his whole nature is linked to the passion of love:

> When hearts have once mingled,
> Love first leaves the well-built nest;
> The weak one is singled
> To endure what it once possessed.

How piteous, and often how true! Love dies, in these cases of enjoyment, or of companionship, and then the weaker of the two only endures the love the departure of which the stronger resents. Shelley, thinking this—and the subtilty of it is characteristic of one who always played with the misty edges of passion rather than with passion itself—suddenly turns to think of his own life, appeals to love, to Love himself, the personal king of Pain and Joy, and asks him why he has been so cruel to him:

> O Love who bewailest
> The frailty of all things here;
> Why chose you the frailest
> For your cradle, your home, and your bier?

Why dost thou choose me, me the frailest of all men, for your birth, your dwelling, and your death? What a cry it is! Were ever words more immaterial, more subtly self-impassioned, more intense, yet more apart from the real human world! It is like the prayer of a Greek boy, in the misery of love, to the god of love.

Next, there is that strange and beautiful comparison, also instinct with the essence of Shelley, in which he likens himself to Actæon who seeing Artemis bathing was changed by the angry goddess into a stag, and hunted down by his own dogs. So have I, said Shelley, looked behind the veil on the naked loveliness of Nature, and seen her, seen the beauty which is inconceivable, the unattainable, the impalpable, but which whosoever has seen must for ever desire, and live and die desiring, and knowing that the desire will be always fruitless. And the thoughts so kindled, and the wishes so awakened, never cease, since they are always unsatisfied, to hunt the heart in which they were born, as Actæon was hunted by his own dogs.

> And his own thoughts along that rugged way
> Pursued like raging hounds their father and their prey.[1]

This is Shelley in his relation to the indefinable essence below material nature which he wished to grasp, but could not. This is Shelley also in his relation to love which he wilfully left undefined, unrealised, but which, embodied to his imagination, as a soul somewhere in the universe which was the second half of his

[1] These lines are Shelley's reminiscence of two lines in a poem of Wordsworth's:

> "And his own mind did like a tempest strong
> Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight along."

It is interesting to compare them. They speak volumes for both poets.

own soul, he strove all his life in vain to find. He saw that spiritual love, by force of imagination, at intervals. He pursued it, but always failed in its pursuit, broken down by weakness. But he was punished for turning away from actual love, because the thoughts the vision awakened in him never ceased to beset him. In this, also, they

> Pursued like raging hounds their father and their prey.

And the close of "Epipsychidion" shows how, even when in a moment of inspiration he had seemed to lay hold of the ineffable spirituality of love, he broke down from this inhuman ecstasy into the uttermost weakness which follows on the attempt to live beyond Nature:

> One hope within two wills, one will beneath
> Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
> One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
> And one annihilation. Woe is me!
> The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
> Into the height of love's rare Universe
> Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.
> I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

This is the end in that matter. Take the same effort to pierce beyond the veil of life as expressed in another form by Shelley. This unutterable cry after the invisible, the impalpable, the vague perception he had of something behind the universe to which he gave so many wandering names, "Spirit of Beauty," "secret Strength of Things," "the shade of his own soul," the "viewless and invisible Consequence," which he did not care to fix, but which not being fixed leaves all his personal poetry strengthless; which he worshipped while yet he knew not what he worshipped, that cry,

which through one lyric after another varies its note, but is forever melancholy, which as he uttered it stung him with barren ecstasy or with despairing sorrow, is sent forth, in its finest shaping, in the Hymn to Intellectual, or Ideal, Beauty. The passion of his artist heart is contained in that poem, and its worship. Why dost thou pass away, Spirit of Beauty; why art thou vague as rainbows on a river? But vague as thou art, thou art not so vague as the answers men have attempted to make to the problems of life. At least, we know something of thee; for we have seen thy loveliness which alone gives grace and strength to life's unquiet dream. Once I found thee in my wild youth; thy shadow fell on me. I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy, and from that moment

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine: have I not kept the vow?
With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
Of studious zeal or love's delight
Outwatched with me the envious night:
They know that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou, O awful Loveliness,
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.

What an outburst of passion! Yet for what? It is profoundly characteristic of Shelley, and it separates him from all other poets, makes his charm, and yet fills us with regret, that this thing to which he gave his worship should be only the shadow of some greater Power which was itself a shadow—for he loved to multiply vagueness on vagueness. It was but the shadow of the

Spirit of Beauty which fell on him in youth, and we find —so out of the real world is he—that the thing which stirred him into wild ecstasy was the shade of a shade, the ghost of a ghost. What other poet has ever lived in such a world, could be wrought to such emotion by the film of a film of thought? Nor was the emotion unreal! It was actual, far more keen and fine than that which he could give to mortal persons. It is the impossibility of our often entering into this super-subtile ethereality, this thin and eager flame of passionate worship for an ideal, like that of Beauty, at the very moment when it is dissolving into the thinnest clouds of thought, which makes Shelley, when he is writing only as the artist, out of his own intellectual imagination, the least comprehensible of all the poets of England. When we think we have secured his thought, it vanishes, to take another form, and unless you are fond of this infinite change, you will not care for Shelley. He is always there, he changes but he cannot die, but if you think to fix him down to one shape, his smile is malign, and his answer is this:

> I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
> And out of the caverns of rain,
> Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
> I arise, and unbuild it again.

Nor indeed would it be at all a good thing for men and women if the greater part of them loved this world of Shelley's. For the result of living always in it, were that possible, is wandering and wearing weakness of soul; shapeless and unsubstantial thoughts, feeling which has no home and no help for man in his trouble and his weariness: and if Shelley had given us nothing else, we could not place him on his lofty pedestal. I

will speak soon of this other side of his work, but I have one word more to say of this ideal poetry. He did not leave it wholly without moral ideas. He created in this immaterial world ethereal images of Justice and Truth, of Fortitude and Power, and they were attended by

> Desires and Adorations,
> Wingèd Persuasions, and veiled Destinies,
> Splendours and Glooms, and glimmering incarnations
> Of Hopes and Fears, and twilight Fantasies,—

hosts of impersonated qualities of the mind that, in their unreality, take away all vitality from the impersonations of the greater moral Ideals. Even these, which we willingly imagine as actual, are stripped of their reality by Shelley's dissolving power. They want that indescribable touch of humanity which draws men, however infinite the ideal, to run towards it with love and tears.

But we have no business to complain of this; nor to assume the high tone of the critical moralist concerning it. When we are as good a poet as Shelley, then perhaps we might be allowed to blame, but if we were, we should not feel inclined to blame. There is a punishment which follows those who cry down Shelley on high ethical grounds, and a severe one it is. They are incapable of caring for his poetry. They will not be convinced that it is a punishment, but that is all the sadder for them. Nor can they see that though half of his poems have no definite aim except the expression of his own indefinite and self-multiplying aspirations and regrets, yet that the other half are prophecies for humanity, full of use, of impulse, of inspiration for mankind. That also is a part of this punishment. But at present I speak only of the personal poetry in which

Shelley was wholly in the world of vague ideal loves and regrets, in the thin æther of imaginative phantasy. Why should we dislike it? It belongs to most of us at one time or another of our life, and often when we are old, and embayed, like an Arctic ship, in the ice of fixed opinions, we look back with sorrow and tender memory to the days when the world of dreams was not too far away for us to soar into and to float in, not knowing whither we were going. Shelley had not lost that when he died; nay, the doing of it was of the essence of his nature. Other poets have not been able to express that fine ethereal world, but the power to tell its tale gives that peculiar virtue to his poetry that makes it different from all other verse, both in itself and in the impression it produces. It is his ineffable quality which divides him from other masters. "The Witch of Atlas" scarcely seems to me to be written at all, but to be a music caused by the movements which the beat of the wings of the Imagination, in arrowy flight and ceaseless, has made in the ether of Ideal Space. It is to be read in one of those rare moments when we have broken every tie which binds us to earth and Heaven and humanity. It is just as well, then, that we should not be able to read it often, but it is delightful to read it once in ten years. But the lyrics written in this strange world of aerial blisses and aerial sorrows are not like the Witch of Atlas, wholly removed from earth. They belong to that secret realm which each has within his own heart, with the pains and joys of which no one intermeddles; where day by day castles are built and overthrown, in the skies of which a thousand clouds are born of the wind of one emotion, and dissolved immediately by the wind of another; and where we

walk among thoughts, which, like swallows, flit around us, but which never come to rest in our bosom. Let the critics say what they please, this is a human world and has its own enchantment. When we find one poet who shapes what we have felt therein as much as it ever can be shaped, but with enough of suggestion to enable us to recall those hours of drift and dream in which we lived so keenly, are we to deny his humanity, and not rather to accept what he bestowed on us with joy? This unearthliness then was Shelley's special quality; not so much, however, the negation of flesh and blood, but the creation of a new world where he lived as truly when he wrote these poems, as he did not then truly live among us; where the forms he made were as vital to him as the things he then saw and heard on earth were not.

Not in opposition to this, but in clear contrast with it, was the Shelley who had the interests of mankind at heart, who could throw himself out of his personal dreaming into the progress of mankind. In that world, as long as he wrote and thought in prose, no one could be more practical and less Utopian than Shelley, when the heat of youth and of "Queen Mab" was over. Apart from his poetry, the millennial visions were put aside, the violence of his denunciation suppressed, and the moral ideas which he made so ideal in verse took the ordinary outline of the higher utilitarian philosophy. If Shelley could have got rid of his imaginative emotion he would have made his moral ideas as concrete as those of John Stuart Mill; he sometimes does so, in prose, even to the irritation of those who love him. Nevertheless it is curious then, as a problem of human nature, to listen to him. Take the following passage as

an instance of his quiet good sense, of the unemotional opinion of the man who is said in "Prometheus Unbound" to wish to overthrow all government—in the "Revolt of Islam" to shriek from end to end for the swift destruction of religion and monarchy and law.

Speaking of England, he says in one of his letters:

> "The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy: to inculcate with fervour both the right of resistance and the right of forbearance. You know my principles incite to take all the good I can get in politics, for ever aspiring to something more. I am one of those whom nothing will fully satisfy, but who are ready to be partially satisfied in all that is practicable."

It is plain then that we have in Shelley the problem, ordinary enough, but made extraordinary in him by the intensity of his nature, of one man living in two worlds, one of ideal emotion, the other of quiet reason, and that in order to form any clear judgment of him we must realise what he was in both and take the resultant —if we can get it. It is better perhaps to say that we must realise that such a man would frequently be found settled for a time on the borderland of both these worlds, where poetic feeling and prosaic reason would balance one another; and at another time would not be settled there, but wandering, and as the mood impelled would rush from one side to the other, now into the world of temperate thinking, now into the world of passionate ideality, so that his work would bear the traces of both worlds, and be, as it were, a mixture of earth and fire.

We should then have four kinds of work. First, work in prose in which quiet and fine thinking, characterised by a clear reasonableness, would prevail. We have that in some of the essays, in the letters, and in the

prefaces to the poems; and in this sphere alone he has the company and the applause of Matthew Arnold. Secondly, work in a realm of poetry in which the reasoning power, as such, is unknown, where under the impulse of most subtle and keen emotion, he wrote such poems as "Adonais," "Epipsychidion," and the greater number of the lyrics. Thirdly, work in which both these characters met, and balanced one another, as in the "Cenci" and in a great part of "Prometheus Unbound"; and fourthly, work in which he tried to be real and to embody with temperance his ideas on the progress of mankind, but was continually swept in spite of himself into an impassioned idealism and fury; but where, feeling himself lost and uncontrolled, he tried to get back again into temperance and reality, and only half succeeded, so that the poem is broken, unequal, unsatisfactory from want of unity of impression. Such a poem is the "Revolt of Islam."

Sometimes, however, this power of impassionating himself as he worked in the realm of the understanding, where analytic reasoning ruled, was a good thing, when the idea he was considering was itself a noble and ideal one. And when he was thus uplifted he wrote with superb beauty.

He is borne away in this fashion in "Adonais." He has been thrilled as he wrote, into keen and lofty feeling, and suddenly, in the rush of this feeling, he rises into a higher conception of the Essence in the universe than that it is Thought alone. He transfers that idea to the realm of emotion—transfers the expression of it from philosophy to poetry—and transfigures it into a spiritual power, into the statement that Love, and Love only, is the universe.

> That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,
> That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
> Of Birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
> Which through the web of Being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
> Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

And this passage has another interest. It touches on the much debated question whether Shelley was an Atheist or not. Shelley was not an Atheist any more than he was a Theist. If we have the right to call him anything, we may name him an ideal Pantheist, and say that, at times, the Essence he conceived as the one supreme Thought—a term interchangeable in his mind with infinite Love—he conceived also as active, and therefore as having conscious being. But so pleased with mystic and vague emotion was Shelley that he never put this conception into clear words, and never, I fancy, reduced it, even in his own mind, into intellectual form. That would have spoiled it, he would have thought, lifted the veil, taken him out of the world of wild desire to know into the world where that desire seems to be satisfied. In desire only he loved to live, loved it so dearly that, if it had been said to him, "You have but one step to make to grasp the actual truth of things," he would not have taken that step, but remained on the border-land; always thrilling with passion to know, and with the dread of knowing, lest he should lose the passion; always retaining himself at the intense point where thought melts into emotion, and emotion, refusing to realise itself, sends its burden back to thought.

He would have recoiled from saying that he had any belief. He would not have said he was a Pantheist. It would have been too definite. And to speak of "God" was almost impossible to him. "The deep thought is imageless," he would have said. To declare God would have given fixity to his thoughts, a centre to his feelings, and he preferred to be a floater in the "intense inane." Yet it is astonishing, knowing the love and reverence that filled him and made his life religious, that the natural tendency of the poet to shape thought so seldom carried him away to any confession of faith in, at least, the Pantheistic Deity. He must have watched over himself against the chance of such a confession, or erased much that he wrote. If so, it was due first to the fact that he was set into the bitterest antagonism to the God of English theology. The name was connected with that which seemed to him the greatest evil, the religion whose theories and practice were against the republican opinions on the victory of which the salvation of the race depended. It was due, secondly, to the careful truthfulness of his mind to itself. He would rather have died than have said a word which could be construed into a belief which he did not possess.

But he *was* sometimes borne away. He could not conceive the thought of an all-pervading Power, by whose indwelling life the universe breathed and acted, and man with it, without becoming ravished beyond himself, and though he does not even then define his feeling of Essential Being, yet he gets very near definition. And at least the passion of the verse, and its emotions, is so great that it influences many persons towards such a faith more than philosophical definition

of it is ever likely to do. He is borne away thus in the passage I have quoted from "Adonais."

Shelley's God was the universe, conceived as conscious and active Love, and the worship he gave it was love. He gave to the whole that part of the whole which was himself. It is pure Pantheism, only, as I have said, the expression of it is transferred from philosophy to poetry. The cold statement that the universe is Mind is fused into the feeling that the universe is Love. A still finer—and as in prose, though in poetic prose, a more important—statement of this spiritualised Pantheism is in the fragment of the "Coliseum," and one cannot but feel that it is Shelley himself who speaks, and in one of his highest hours.

"O Power," cried the old man, "thou which interpenetratest all things and without which this glorious world were a blind and formless chaos, Love, Author of Good, God, King, Father, Friend of these thy worshippers! Two solitary hearts invoke thee, may they be divided never! If the contentions of mankind have been their misery; if to give and seek that happiness which thou art, has been their choice and destiny, if in the contemplation of these majestic records of the power of their kind, they see the shadow and the prophecy of that which thou mayst have decreed man shall become; if the justice, the liberty, the loveliness, the truth which are thy footsteps, have been sought by them, *divide them not*! It is thine to unite, to eternise, to make outlive the limits of the grave those who have left among the living memorials of thee!"

That at least proves that in moments of poetic exaltation Shelley conceived a Supreme Being, self-

conscious of himself as Love, whom we knew ideally as the universe, of whom we ourselves were part.

If Shelley had held even this belief clearly it would have been sufficient to give him that strength which is contained in the possession of a centre of thought, fixed beyond ourselves. But it never became distinct enough in him to be worth much as a source of power.

Being thus vague, a light, now appearing, now disappearing, on the ocean which he sailed, it left him always somewhat troubled, without that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power. He was washed hither and thither, like sea-weed on the wave, to the very end. Sceptical even in relation to Pantheism, he worshipped he knew not what. He knew no reason why he should worship, and no reasonable end to be served by his worship. His longing after Good, his love of Love, were strong, but what the Good was, or what the Love, he could not tell. He mingled all the world with Thought, but how, or whence or what the Thought was, he could not say. "This is the Cause," cries the first Spirit in the song. "That is the Cause," cried another. And the third Spirit replies—and it is Shelley's voice—

> Peace! The abyss is wreathed in scorn
> At thy presumption—Atom born!

Pure scepticism! but scepticism traversed by hours of high enthusiasm, and of faith in—what I cannot tell. And it had all the weakness which flows from scepticism which does not care to escape from itself, and all the dejection which follows on hours of emotional faith when they have passed away. In such an hour he realised what it was to be alone in the void universe.

We hear Shelley's voice in the cry of Beatrice—behind the changeable, no unchangeable, behind the shadows in which we live, no substance to cast them, nothing on which to rest, nothing behind the veil he shrank from lifting lest he should see infinite emptiness.

> Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
> No God, no Heaven, no Earth, in the void world,
> The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world.

That was the way he felt towards the idea of God. The next question is, How did he feel and think concerning humanity? And here we connect him with the French Revolution. In the "Prometheus Unbound" he embodies more fully than elsewhere his belief and hope in humanity, and it refers throughout to the political and social position in which Shelley considered the world to be in his time—mankind thrown again into the bondage of the old evils, and suffering from the reaction against the excesses of the Revolution. But before we come to that poem there are other things to say concerning Shelley's attitude towards the ideas of the Revolution.

He was in rebellion from his youth with the exhausted society I have already described. Unlike Wordsworth, he was a part of that class in English society which remained from the beginning untouched by the Revolution and which hated it. As he grew up he abhorred that society and all its ways, and directed all his energy against its opinions. He was a revolution in himself. He set the authorities at Eton at defiance; he was expelled from Oxford for atheism, and at once took his stand in a revolt against society. Then it was, for I scarcely trace it earlier in his writings, that the still

enduring ground-swell the French Revolution had caused in England broke upon him, and he was flooded by it. That swelling tide, though it had died out in the middle ranks of society, was still heaving among the working classes, and among many minor poets who sang their wrongs and sorrows. The misery they suffered increased its volume, and the ideas of which we have so often spoken rolled on in full power under the upper crust. Shelley went down to that level and drank there the cup of the Revolution. In 1812 he took up the cause of Ireland, and his "Address to the Irish People" might have been written at this present time by a gentle-minded Home Ruler. In 1813 "Queen Mab" came out. In it the ideas of the Revolution are reasserted, combined with a deliberate attack on the whole state of society in England, and a deliberate attack on religion as one of the chief curses of society. But the chief revolutionary element in it is that which prophesies a happier society, a golden time to come, the perfection of mankind to be wrought out by suffering, by martyrdom for truth. Shelley was really in despair about the present, and he was forced to look forward for all he hoped and all he wished to work for. This was the position of his whole life. Nothing could be more unlike the position of Wordsworth and Coleridge in the dawn of the Revolution. As Wordsworth wrote:

> Before them shone a glorious world,
> Fresh as a banner bright, unfurled
> To music suddenly.

All was joy, hope, ideal faith with them, but Shelley lived in the exhaustion, and all seemed to him dead. Sorrow, and mournful faith, hope that had its fulfilment

only far away, were his. The passion of the earlier time was infinitely distant, and though he tried to rekindle it in himself, the ashes were too cold. The result of that, realised after he had written "Queen Mab," lies before us in "Alastor." A cruel demon, an Alastor, a spirit of evil—a spirit which isolated him from the interests and hopes of men, had seized on him, and drove him far away to die alone in the wilderness; and thus he ends the poem:

> Art and eloquence
> And all the shows o' the world, are frail and vain
> To weep a loss that turns their light to shade.
> It is a woe "too deep for tears" when all
> Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
> Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
> Those who remain behind not sobs or groans,
> The passionate tumult of a clinging hope,
> But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
> Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
> Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

After this, in the reaction to brightness which follows gloom, his hopes for man revived. Again the great conceptions of the Revolution laid their inspiring hand upon him. Again the Serpent fought with the all-dominating Eagle, and the "Revolt of Islam" was written to predict a greater and a nobler Revolution than that of France. This is his own statement in the Preface, and I quote it because it marks Shelley's place in relation to the Revolution, and illustrates all I have said concerning the result of it on English society:

> The panic which like an epidemic transport seized upon all classes of men during the excesses consequent on the French Revolution, is gradually giving place to sanity. It has ceased to be believed that whole generations of mankind ought to consign themselves to a hopeless inheritance of ignorance and misery be-

cause a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries were incapable of conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquillity of freemen as soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened. There is a reflux in the tide of human things which bears the shipwrecked hopes of men into a secure haven, after the storms are past. Methinks those who now live have survived the age of despair.

Gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the time in which we live . . . this influence has tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds from which it flows. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following poem.

This was in 1817—two years after Waterloo—and the poem marks a point of historical value in the history of English emotion—that is of English poetry—as connected with the impulse of the Revolution. At the very moment when Wordsworth was dying to all the thoughts he had once loved, so far as they were connected with social and political matters, another poet began to live for them. Such is the way in which, in poetry, the torch dropped by one hand is taken up by another, and the great impulses of the race are continued and carried to their goal.

But Shelley could not wholly escape his age. The world repelled the prophecy, the apathy and indifference which encompassed him, again overwhelmed him. The poem ends in a cry which just escapes despair. The representatives of Love and Genius and Virtue are slain, the world is left under the tyranny of kings and priests and wealth, and the only hope is that the martyrdom of those who have died for truth may bring forth hereafter the eternal morning of freedom and of love.

Then he left England for ever. And there, in Italy, in a brighter land, away from the dreariness of the dead world he hated, he again recovered hope. Nay, more,

in the "Masque of Anarchy" and in other small pieces he wrote directly on the present, and not on the future only. About the same time appeared "Prometheus Unbound."

This choric song of the deliverance of humanity, of brotherhood, of love, of equality and liberty, of moral purity and freedom from convention, of a world all beautiful, of Nature at one with mankind, of man delivered from law because he loves only what is right, would never have been written had he remained in England. It is the high-level mark of Shelley as possessed with the revolutionary ideas. Not possessed with them as they appeared when France let them go in 1799, not even with them altogether as they appeared in '89. There was now a difference. The way of force seemed to him not to have succeeded in reaching its end. The despotism which emerged from measures which contradicted love of all men, even of the men who were oppressors, made him feel that the way of France was wrong; and Shelley in his "Prometheus" represented humanity conquering by sufferance, by endurance of all evil, by faith in good, by unalterable love, by hope which knew that good must conquer.

The poem refers throughout to the political and social condition in which Shelley considered the world to be in his time—mankind thrown again into the bondage of the old evils, and suffering from the reaction against the excesses of the Revolution. Humanity was bound again to the rock by triumphant evil. Nevertheless it was not to despair. Deliverance was at hand, though many years might have to pass away. But at present there was nothing for the Prometheus of humanity to do, but to endure, resolute not to give in

to evil things, until the ideas of liberty, justice and love should so spread among men that the fight against the eagle might be renewed. Then Prometheus will be unbound. This political reference runs through the drama. It is suppressed in the poetry, but it makes itself understood. The real subject is more epic than dramatic. It is the purification of humanity by suffering evil and not yielding to it. The whole government of the world was in the hands of an evil power, which though it was doomed, still reigned. Faith in its certain doom and patience which waited for it were the powers man possessed, and the only powers he could justly use; and there were those who used them, and those who did not, who joined themselves to the evil. There were two aspects, then, in which he conceived humanity. There was first an actual humanity which submitted to evil, did evil and suffered for it. There was secondly an ideal humanity contained in the actual, which did no wrong, which was itself sinless, but which suffered from the evil in the actual humanity and suffered for its sake. Guiltless itself, it bore the woe which the evil had made, and evil, finding it unsubdued, and hating it, poured upon it all his arrows. This was Prometheus, the Ideal Man, the Saviour of the world, suffering through evil, in order to redeem from evil, men whom he loved so well that he would endure for them untold ages of pain, enduring woes innumerable rather than bend for one moment to the will of wrong, because on his fall men would be lost to good—the fortunes of the whole race hanging on his single perseverance, on his single will—suffering, yet supported in suffering by the sure and certain faith that evil must be overthrown, and Love at last triumphant.

The day at last arrives and evil is hurled into the abyss. The Ideal Humanity is set free, and in his victory all humanity is saved, all Nature set free for joy. Man is knit again to Nature in perfect harmony, symbolised in the drama by the marriage of Asia and Prometheus, and the whole universe bursts in the fourth act into the choral song of triumph and delight.

And such a deliverance, Shelley thought, could be wrought only as Prometheus wrought it, on his rock, by Love which even withdraws from the oppressor the ancient curse he laid upon him:

> Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
> These are the seals of that most firm assurance,
> Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
> And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
> Mother of many acts and hours, should free
> The serpent that would clasp her with his length,
> These are the spells by which to re-assume
> An empire o'er the disentangled doom.[1]

This is the poem which will always be of the value of a great prophecy to man whenever he is overwhelmed with the pains of a travail to a new birth. In it Shelley is ideal, but the passion and the power of the love of his brothers is felt throughout, and makes it real.

Whenever men, as now, are troubled with coming change; whenever, as now, the curse of selfishness and oppression is deeply felt and deeply resented, whenever the effort against it, as now, is patient, enduring, full of faith, save among a few whom Shelley would

[1] "It is a state of society," he says elsewhere, "to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long-suffering and long believing courage and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue. Such is the lesson which experience teaches now." (1817.)

have repudiated—the "Prometheus Unbound" will always be, and because of its very ideality, the consolation and the food of men. It is Shelley's great tribute to the progress of mankind, and it is one which will always make his name a blessing and a spell.

But there was also another work he did which is distinctly connected with the Revolution. It is his work in theology, of which, elsewhere, I have often spoken. The proclamation of the universal ideas about man, of his universal equality, brotherhood and freedom from all coercive authority, that is authority of which man is not himself the free author, rendered the imperialistic theology of the Churches wholly at variance with the new life of humanity. From the moment these ideas seized on man, every doctrine, however long their remnants may cling, which was against the universal brotherhood and equality of man, every doctrine which claimed an irresponsible or an infallible authority over the reason, conscience or affections of men, and oppressed them by means of that authority, were doomed. The political ideas were certain to be transferred to the realm of religion because those political ideas were themselves religious.

An immense impulse to this was given by Shelley. He brought the worn-out ideas of the ancient theology and all the evils they had wrought—the evils of imperialism—into the arena of the affections and the conscience of men. "Is it possible," he cried, "that the heart of man or the moral sense of man can now endure these things?" And the whole question became not only a question of theological debate, but of passionate feeling. This was to strike the first blow which made it possible to bring the root conceptions of the Revolution

into theology. It was a great thing to do, and Shelley did it as it should be done, with passion, with intolerable desire to deliver men from a terrible slavery.

And then, for a time, the mighty impulse of the French Revolution ended. Indeed it had in England ended in poetry before Shelley died. In the poetry of Keats there is not a trace that it had ever been. None of its ideas appear. There is no universal interest in man, not even that which was deepest in Shelley, the interest in the possible perfection of the race. Keats cares only for beauty, and he seeks it only in the past, in the loveliness of Greece, in the romance of the Middle Ages. Shelley closes for a time the record of the Revolution in English poetry.

CHAPTER X

SHELLEY'S INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIANITY

THERE is a remarkable fragment of an "Essay on Christianity," by Shelley, which gives his view of Jesus Christ and of his teaching, and I would draw attention to it, especially in its relation to modern criticism and modern theology on the religious position and aims of Christ. The essay is full of noteworthy things, and it bears, independent of the prose style which is his own, the unmistakable stamp of Shelley's character and imagination.

It is, in truth, the attempt to carry out a direct and long-cherished intention. In the notes on "Queen Mab," he speaks of Christ as "in the foremost list of those true heroes who died for humanity." In a sub-note to this, he expresses an after-thought which reverses his judgment in the text with regard to the objects of Jesus, but this after-thought he so completely laid aside, that he told Trelawny it was his desire to write a life of Christ which should revoke it. It seems to me that this fragment was an attempt to carry out that intention, and that it took the form of an essay because, as he said to Trelawny, he found the materials for a life of Christ, from his point of view, inadequate.

I do not know on what grounds the essay is put so early in Shelley's life as 1815 by Mr. Rossetti. I should be inclined from internal evidence, and especially from certain of its phrases analogous to expressions in his

later poems, to place it at least four years later, but internal evidence is always shaky evidence. Still, it does exist, and I shall want a good deal of proof to make me believe that this essay was written only two years after the publication of "Queen Mab."

Again, the great admiration it expresses for the character of Jesus may be contrasted with a letter of Shelley's in 1822, in which these words occur:

> I differ from Moore in thinking Christianity useful to the world; no man of sense can think it true. I agree with him that the doctrines of the French and material philosophy are as false as they are pernicious, but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism.

Shelley succeeds in that sentence in hitting all round, but in striking at Christianity he does not mean to strike at Christ. His blow is directed against the popular and orthodox form of Christianity, as corrupted by churches into a despotism, and not against the doctrine and practice of Christ himself. He makes this distinction himself, even in the notes to "Queen Mab"; and the main drift of this essay is to vindicate Christ and his teaching from the perversions imposed on them. He declares that the time has arrived when these perversions are no longer tenable, when we can put them aside and ask ourselves what it was that Jesus really taught. And looking straight at Christ and his life, he finds that the true drift of his teaching is in direct opposition to the greater number of the doctrines taught in his name.

Alas, the time had not arrived! Nor has it yet arrived, though many forward steps have been made towards it. There are still doctrines preached about God which make him into the Demon whom Shelley

hated, which, by filling him with a Revenge which they call Justice, mingle up his character with that attributed to Satan. There are still schemes of doctrine which make him into the hater of men, which represent him as the author of eternal hell—that intolerable falsehood which has been the deadliest curse of human kind—which makes him the supporter of tyrants, oppressors, and of aristocracies. There are still representations of the teaching of Jesus which make him Deity, and take him away from us as our brother-man, which destroy or ignore the high socialism of his life, and by making his birth, his history, and all that he did supernatural, place him outside of the pale of knowledge.

It is only when he is freed from these false garments that we can see him as he is. I have said this for many years, and preached another Christ from that of the theologians. Shelley said it, as we shall see, more than ninety years ago; and there is no more remarkable vindication of Jesus from the orthodox view of him, and no more remarkable anticipation of the position Jesus will take in the future, than this essay of Shelley's.

He is speaking of the biographers of Christ—and he speaks, in blaming them for what they have, out of their own minds, imputed to Jesus, of all those also who from generation to generation have perverted his character and made him the supporter of the panic fears and superstitions which Shelley maintains he hated and used all his faith and reason to oppose. In spite, he says, of all the misrepresentations Jesus Christ has suffered from, enough remains to show that he is the enemy of oppression and falsehood, that he is the advocate of equal justice, that he is disposed to sanction

neither bloodshed nor deceit, under whatever pretences their practice may be vindicated. We discover that he was a "man of meek and majestic demeanour, calm in danger, of natural and simple thought and habits, beloved to adoration by his adherents; unmoved, solemn, severe," "of miraculous dignity and simplicity of character," "of invincible gentleness and benignity," who represented to mankind a God of Universal Love.

The essay is written, however, from the point of view of an Agnostic, as we should call Shelley to-day. And I say this to guard Shelley from being mistaken. There are passages in this essay which seem to go very far towards an expression of a settled belief in a Divine Being and in Immortality, and in a battle between powers of good and evil beyond this earth. But we must always take care not to make too much of the phrases of Shelley. His custom was, when he had to state the opinion of another—as, for example, in this essay on Christ—to put himself aside, and to write as if the real holder of the opinion was writing; and this is often puzzling. And it is made more puzzling by his way of becoming emotionalised as he wrote, even by opinions with which he disagreed, if they happened to be noble or imaginative. For the moment, then, he speaks as if they were personal, and throws around them an emotion which their transient passage through his mind has created. In many places in this essay he is swept away, in describing the views of Christ concerning God and Immortality to speak of them as if they were his own, and he actually uses expressions about them in prose which are borrowed from his own poetry. We must remember, then, that such expressions mean no

more than that he was moved by the beauty of the ideas Christ had concerning God and Immortality, and that he could not help ornamenting them and feeling them as his own, for a time, with a poet's ready sympathy. Take this passage. One would say that it positively asserted the existence of God, and of God with a will which he exercises upon us:

> We live, and move, and think; but we are not the creators of our own origin and existence. We are not the arbiters of every motion of our own complicated nature; we are not the masters of our own imaginations and moods of mental being. There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will.
>
> This power is God; and those who have seen God have, in the period of their purer and more perfect nature, been harmonised by their own will to so exquisite a consentaneity of power as to give forth divinest melody when the breath of universal being sweeps over their frame.

That is a strong passage for a man whom the world called an Atheist to have written. It would be strong for a modern Agnostic to write. But we have no business to assume from it that Shelley expresses in it—as I should like to assume—his settled thought. He is either saying what he thought Jesus thought about God, or he is carried away by the splendour of the speculation into emotional poetry. For he did not by any means always think that—the existence of a Being who acted on us was a matter he held in suspension. But while I would not make too much of expressions used in this essay concerning matters of faith, there is no necessity for this caution when we come to what he says of Jesus Christ. For here, he speaks of Christ as an historical character and as a man, and of the teaching which belonged naturally to such a character;—and

he subjects the history and the character to rational criticism.

And first—with regard to the criticism. He gives up, as we do, a good deal of the history; he doubts, as we do, "that Jesus said many things imputed to him in the four Gospels"; he dwells on the fact that "there is no written record of Jesus by himself, and that the information we have is imperfect and obscure." "Yet," he says, "sufficiently clear indications are left by which we can discover the genuine character of Christ." And having found that character, "we can put aside," he continues, "as inventions many things which he is reported to have said, and which contradict his character, and corrupt the simplicity of his truth." And then he gives an example, which, though he is in error—for the phrase was used by St. Paul—yet explains fully what he means. "For instance," he says, "it is utterly incredible that Christ should say that if you hate your enemy you would find it to your account to return good for evil, since by such a temporary oblivion of vengeance you would heap coals of fire on his head. Where such contradictions occur, a favourable construction is warranted by the rule of criticism which forbids all narrowness in judging of the actions of a man who has acted a large part in the world. We ought to form a general opinion of his character and doctrine, and refer to this whole the distinct portions of action and speech by which they are diversified."

The phrase is an old Jewish proverb, and does not bear the meaning Shelley imposes on it. It only means that if you return good for evil you will waken in your injurer a burning sorrow for what he has done, and lead him to love you in the end.

At the time Shelley wrote thus his words would be considered dreadful infidelity, for, of course, they imply that there is no such thing as a plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. But now, all is changed—and that which was gross infidelity in Shelley has been a common thing for years past among persons whom no one in his senses accuses of being actual infidels. A reverent historical criticism has been applied to the history of the Gospels. It is one of our most serious labours to clear away from the image of Jesus the legendary elements added to his story, to find out what was added to his teaching by the composers of the Gospels, to isolate his real doings and sayings from those which contradict his character—and it is profoundly interesting to find Shelley, ninety years ago, laying down quietly in his room the laws by which modern scholars, who count themselves Christians, have striven to get a clear image of Jesus Christ. This is the prophetic power of the poet, dreaming of things to be.

Then he applies himself to consider the symbolic and poetic phrases of Jesus, and to contradict those persons who take them literally, and make them, literally taken, the ground of an attack on the wisdom of Jesus—such phrases as, "Blessed are the poor"; "If a man smite you on the one cheek, turn to him the other"; "Take no thought for the morrow." No intelligent man, who had realised the character of Christ, or the poetic method of his teaching, would join in such an attack, and Shelley, infidel as he was called, did the very contrary. He quotes, for example, "Take no thought for the morrow," and says, "If we would profit by the wisdom of a sublime and poetical mind, we must beware of the vulgar error of inter-

preting literally every expression it employs. Nothing can be more remote from truth than the literal construction of such expressions. Jesus Christ is here simply exposing, with the passionate rhetoric of enthusiastic love towards all human beings, the miseries and mischiefs of the system which makes all things subservient to the subsistence of the material frame of man." It would be well if those who are continually attacking the sayings of Jesus would remember the warning of Shelley, and his view that they are partakers of a vulgar error. It would be well if they could form the most distant acquaintance with the poetical temper of a prophet's mind. It would be well, if by some slight reading of Oriental books, they could have even a vague knowledge of the way that Orientals speak. It would be well if they would accustom themselves a little to ideas and not only to their forms. It would be well, if that were not too much to ask, that they tried at least to comprehend the way that Genius speaks—and then we should have less of the absurdities of literal interpretation which have been forced on the sayings of Jesus. But the sayings will last for ever—just because they are couched in a manner which these literalising persons cannot or will not comprehend.

Lastly, on these critical questions, Shelley put aside all discussion on the nature and existence of the miracles. "The supposition," he says, "of their falsehood or truth would not modify in any degree the hues of the picture of Christ which is attempted to be delineated. To judge truly of the moral or philosophical character of Socrates, it is not necessary to determine the question of the familiar spirit which it is supposed he believed attended on him." The character of Jesus remained

the same to Shelley whether the miracles were true or not. Nay, Shelley goes further, and declares that Jesus himself did not believe in miraculous interference. "The doctrine," he says, "of what some fanatics have termed a peculiar Providence—that is, of some Power beyond and superior to that which ordinarily guides the operation of the Universe, interfering to punish the vicious and reward the virtuous—is explicitly denied by Jesus Christ." Thus, while Shelley put aside the supernatural, the character of Jesus remained to him equally loving and majestic.

Again, that is what we have come to. We have seen that the miraculous elements in the Gospels belong to the time in which they were written. They have no existence for us at all. And, when they are left out, Jesus Christ remains, not indeed Deity, but loving humanity; not a weaker power in the history of the human race, but a stronger power. To bind him up with miracle is to enfeeble his influence, and, as knowledge goes on, to lessen its expansion.

So far for the critical part of this essay. What else is contained in it, I will bring together under one question —*What was the teaching of Christ, according to Shelley's reading of the Gospels?*

First, Jesus taught concerning God that he was a universal Being, differing from man and from the mind of man, the overruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included in the circle of existing things, the collective energy of the moral and material world; the Power from whom the streams of all that is excellent flow, which models as they pass all the elements of this mixed universe to the most pure and perfect shape it belongs to their nature to assume; the source of Love, the

merciful and benignant Power, who desired not the death of a sinner and made his sun to shine on the just and unjust, the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world.

"This mighty Being Christ declared the pure in heart should see." This is how Shelley explains that. It is curious to hear Shelley as a sermon-writer, but here that strange spirit plays the part:

> Blessed are those who have preserved eternal sanctity of soul; who are conscious of no secret deceit; who are the same in act as they are in desire; who conceal no thought, no tendencies of thought, from their own conscience; who are faithful and sincere witnesses, before the tribunal of their own judgments, of all that passes within their mind. Such as these shall see God.

Having thus said what God was to Christ—and it is curious that he does not dwell on the word Father—Shelley goes on to say what he was not. It has been often said to me, when I have said that Christ never taught the doctrine of everlasting punishment, that I have read into his sayings what I wish to be true of him; that I throw back on Christ the more tolerant morality of our own time. Well, Shelley says precisely the same thing, and he cannot be said to hold a brief for the Christian side. He is indignant with the notion that Christ taught any doctrine of vengeance of this kind on the part of God. He calls it "a monstrous calumny which impostors have dared to advance against the mild and gentle author of the just sentiment of 'Love your enemies that you may be the sons of your Heavenly Father, who makes his sun to shine on the good and evil and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust'—against the whole tenor of his doctrines and his life,

overflowing with benevolence and forbearance and compassion."

Shelley was one of the first who saw that the whole character of Jesus forbade such a conception of God. Men call this justice, he says, but Jesus summoned his whole resources of persuasion to oppose this doctrine of avenging justice. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you; such, Christ said, was the practice of God, and such must you imitate if you will be the children of God. "Hell, then, was not the conception of the daring mind of Christ." On the contrary, this hideous doctrine of retaliation, the panic fears and hateful superstitions of which have enslaved men in all ages, Christ, according to Shelley, stood against to the death. Even the evil power which Shelley thought had dominion in this world, and which he believed that Jesus believed in, was doomed.

Christ asserted that, Shelley said, and Shelley asserted it for himself; and the passage in which he paints Christ's doctrine of Immortality, and of the utter overthrow of evil beyond the grave, is written with such emotion and fire and admiration, that we half persuade ourselves that, at least while he wrote it, the poet in him believed it. He did not do more than hope it to be true, but, borne away by the "heart-moving and lovely thought," as he calls it, of Jesus, he himself carries it on for the moment.

Then he breaks forth into a denunciation of the whole doctrine that injury is always to be avenged. He paints the horrors which the world has suffered from the duty of retaliation; and he shows how mankind, transmitting from generation to generation the legacy of accumulating vengeances, have not failed to

attribute to the Universal Cause a character analogous to their own. "A God of wrath and revenge such as Christianity has too often pictured, is not the creation of Jesus, but of the hatreds of man. Against this superstition," he says, which destroyed men, and blackened the character of God, "Jesus protested with earnest eloquence." He showed a different God from this dreadful Being. He told his disciples to be perfect in love as their Father in heaven was perfect. He proclaimed his belief that human perfection as well as divine required the refraining from revenge in any shape whatever, and especially when it was called justice.

Having laid all this down, Shelley goes on to dwell on all that Jesus said, and on his position towards the teachers of this retaliation as a part of the character of God. "Jesus Christ," he says, "proceeds to qualify and finally to abrogate the system of the Jewish Law. He descants upon its insufficiency as a code of moral conduct, and absolutely selects the law of retaliation as an instance of the absurdity and immorality of its institutions. The conclusion of the speech is in a strain of the most daring and impassioned speculation. He seems emboldened to declare in public the utmost singularity of his faith. He tramples on all received opinions, on all the cherished luxuries and superstitions of mankind. He bids them cast away the claims of custom and blind faith by which they have been encompassed from the very cradle of their being, and receive the imitator and minister of the Universal God."

Then from that saying of "Be ye perfect as your Father is perfect," Shelley infers that Jesus taught

that the perfection of the divine and human character was the same. "The abstract perfection of the human character is the type of the actual perfection of the divine." And no truer thing can possibly be said of the teaching of Christ. "I and the Father are one." I, a man, am at one with the Father. This is what I am ceaselessly trying to teach as the very root of the doctrine of Jesus. He said it, not as God, but as a man—not for himself alone, but for all mankind. "We and the Father are one." And the poet saw that truth in Jesus, as we see it now. Indeed, it is the very foundation of all the doctrine of Christ; the ground of personal and social religion; the ground of all human associations and their duties; the ground of the rights of man and of their liberty, equality, and fraternity; the ground of their happiness and their immortality. It is the one saying we should inscribe on the banner of human progress: "We and the Father are one." It is a wonderful thing that Shelley saw this so many years ago, and saw it in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, Shelley turns to the social aspect of the teaching of Jesus, and he comprises it in one word—*The equality of mankind.* He quotes the sermon at Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me."[1] "This is an enunciation," he says, "of all that Plato and Diogenes have speculated on the equality of mankind." But, in Christ's idea, as Shelley thought, this equality, which took in not only a community of thoughts and feelings, but also of external possessions, was not to be established by force, nor by enactment, but by the growth of love among mankind, by a sacrifice of the desires of the flesh, by a contempt of outward

[1] Luke iv. 17; and especially vv. 25–27.

in the cause of truth and love—than the "Prometheus Unbound"; which the more we know and love the better for us. The character of Prometheus is partly built on the character of Christ. His moral position towards mankind, and towards Jupiter, is the position of Christ towards suffering man, and towards the powers of the world, who crucified Jesus because he would not yield to their policy and their priestcraft, nor back up their power, exercised for their own advantage over the bodies and souls of men. The means of Prometheus are the means of Jesus—nothing but enduring love. His triumph is the triumph of perfect Love, which brings about the regeneration of the whole world of man and the freedom and the glory and beauty of the world of Nature—a new Heaven and a new Earth. It is the very faith of Jesus concerning the future translated into another form, and this essay on Christianity proclaims that Shelley thought it was the faith of Jesus. All that he says Jesus held concerning the equality of man and the proper means of attaining it are described and declared in magnificent song in the "Prometheus." To accuse Shelley of violence is to accuse Tolstoy of violence. Both desire the same things, and desire them in the same way. Both repudiate, with Jesus, the use of any force for their winning, except the forces of stern rejection of wrong-doing—of love, of forgiveness, of endurance, in trust in the certainty of the victory of everlasting love. I close with the closing lines of the "Prometheus," which embody this view:

> To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite,
> To forgive wrongs darker than death and night,
> To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;

To love and bear, to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, Victory.

CHAPTER XI

THE POETRY OF BYRON

LORD BYRON was born 22nd January, 1788, and at the age of nineteen in 1807 published his first volume of poems —the "Hours of Idleness." They were pretty, empty, butterfly lyrics, but they had a melody and a command of verse which one would scarcely expect from a boy of nineteen and a fashionable young fellow. The "Edinburgh Review" thought it worth its while, probably because its author was a peer, to take up this little book, and to break it on the wheel. But the "Edinburgh Review" caught a Tartar. Though the book was smashed, the writer was not. A boy extremely sensitive, as Byron was, might have been crushed by this brutality. But Byron was not only as sensitive as a cat to praise or blame, he had also, with the sensitiveness, the power of the great cats. He turned upon his foe like a tiger, and the Edinburgh reviewer felt like Sir Andrew Aguecheek—"If I had known he had been so cunning of fence, I had been damned ere I had meddled with him." In March, 1809, appeared "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," a satire as vigorous as it was unfair—unfair save to the reviewers—for in it he lashed, with the unsparing mercilessness and blindness of youth, all the poets also of his time. No one can read it without laughter, it is so full of wit; no one can read it without admiration, it is so full of power; no one can read it without regret, it is so full

of savagery and injustice. But Byron was stung to the bone. He was very young, and with that frankness of repentance which was so charming in him, he expressed afterwards his profound sorrow for all that he had unjustly or coarsely said, and in such terms that those whom he abused forgave him. With all his follies, with all his reckless crimes against himself, with all his crimes against others—and some of these were mean—with all his worldliness, with all his selfishness—and it was great—Byron was a lovable person, and no one can fairly criticise his work who has not felt some affection for him, who has not seen, behind his faults and sins, the good which he so often laboured to conceal. He was a boy almost to the end of his life; boyish in his passions, in his capacity for reasoning or for serious thought, in the want of fine art in his work, in his ill-regulated life, and in his ill-finished verse. And we forgive much to the boy which we do not forgive to the man.[1] But with these failings of the boy, he had in him the power of a young giant, and when a rush of impulse came upon him, he was like the youthful Hercules. Reynolds' picture of Hercules in his cradle, strangling the serpents, may well stand for Byron and the Scotch Reviewers. It is this which characterises the poem and the man and his work—power, and power

[1] Yet in saying this we still blame Byron severely, for he had no business to remain a boy. When he became in years a man he ought to have put away the thoughts, the understanding, and the actions of a young barbarian. Yet even here he was heavily weighted. He was a peer of the realm, a dreadful position for a young man unless he has the genius for politics. He was involved in all the stupidities, in all the false position, in all the ignorance of the world and of the ideas that rule mankind which fashionable society creates. It is to his credit that he broke away from it, but its atmosphere, and that of his aristocratic position, hung around him for nearly all his life, and was as lead upon his wings, and as a mist before his eyes.

which easily sprang into passion, and which under the wind of passion was marked by sincerity, except when he was speaking about himself. Yet even when he began to write about himself he was often sincere, and we hear that note in some of the domestic pieces and in certain portions of "Childe Harold." It was, however, his fate, whenever he dwelt on himself, to pass after a time into insincerity, either to mock at his own self-revelation, or to overlay it with false sentiment, so much did his worldliness, that is his bravado-fear of the world's opinion, spoil his nature. A boy's character, a man's force in his work, sincerity when moved by passion, but which glided into insincerity when the passionate feeling was succeeded by a return to self-consciousness, these are elements in the man and his poetry, but they are not all of which we shall have to speak.

That poetry is not now read as it once was. There have been almost two generations which have not known Joseph. So much laughter was raised over the Corsairs that appeared amongst undergraduates, over the blighted clerks and medical students whom Macaulay sketched with so ponderous a hand, so much moral indignation was spent on what he calls in his hippopotamus style, "the pernicious and absurd association between intellectual and moral depravity, misanthropy and voluptuousness," that Byron's poetry was shelved. Again, the new outburst of poetry after 1832, representing the actual interests of the age, in direct opposition to the Byronic mood which would extend the dramatic sentimentalism of youth over the whole of manhood, and in direct assertion that all morbidness was irreligious, all self-introspection selfish, all misanthropy

sinful, and all the cry of being misunderstood contemptible, overwhelmed poor Byron out of sight.

That extremely muscular and healthy condition of the public mind was, and is, very well. If it had not been so excessively athletic it might have lasted longer. We have been suffering from the reaction which has followed it. During that reaction, however, many of us have taken up our Byron again, and find that, having expended our moral indignation at his wrong-doings and the unhealthy elements in his work, we can now with some temperance and calmness see what is beautiful and interesting in him. Time has done its work, like charity, and covered his sins, and they no longer hide his excellences as a poet. We are able to feel this curious and astonishing thing—That the affectations of consuming suffering, of himself as the special victim of destiny, the expressions of commonplace thoughts in words far too lofty for the body they clothe, which would be all hailed with mockery on the lips of another, neither seem ridiculous in him, nor damage the poetry in which they are represented, so colossal is the strength he uses, so easily is it put forth, so consistently is it sustained. If he starts forth on a digression, a digression of twenty long stanzas, we cannot, at first, believe that he will not be wearisome, that we shall not be impatient to get back to the story. Not at all! The digression is as pleasant reading as the rest; it is full of surprises, its wit flashes incessantly and innocuously on the whole, it never flags in movement. Wordsworth becomes distressing when he digresses, we are more sorry for him than we are for ourselves, the steps he takes are so weary. Shelley when he leaves his subject flutters wildly, like a comet that has lost its way in

space, flying "dim in the intense inane," but Byron, when he abandons his story, leaps the hedge from the road, and is gone "over bank, bush, and scaur" where his fancy leads him, and yet comes back to whence he started without turning a hair. No one else has this delightful ease of movement, this conscious power of going. "They'll have fleet steeds that follow, quoth young Lochinvar." Even where single expressions are poor, or when the thought is, as it often is, commonplace, the vigour of the whole verse saves the thought, and makes us think the thought uncommon. Here for example are the lines in "Childe Harold" about the skull:

> Remove yon skull from out the scattered heaps:
> Is that a temple where a God may dwell?
> Why even the worm at last disdains her shattered cell.
>
> * * * *
>
> Look on its broken arch, its ruined wall,
> Its chambers desolate, and portals foul:
> Yes, this was once Ambition's airy hall,
> The dome of Thought, the palace of the Soul:
> Behold through each lack-lustre, eyeless hole,
> The gay recess of Wisdom and of Wit,
> And Passion's host, that never brooked control:
> Can all saint, sage, or sophist ever writ
> People this lonely tower, this tenement refit?
>
> ("Childe Harold," Canto II. 5, 6.)

So far as the ideas are concerned Young might have written it; they are the commonplace of the copy-book. But how different the manner, the building of the verse, and the music to which it is built! Young would have burst asunder before he could have written a line of it. It is not quite imagination, it is certainly not fancy only. It is below imagination and above fancy, it is on their borderland. The thoughts are poor,

the mode in which they are expressed is like a trumpet call. If we want imagination piercing into the same subject we must read what Hamlet says with Yorick's skull in his hands :

1st Clown.... This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.
Hamlet. This ?
1st Clown. E'en that.
Hamlet. Let me see. Alas, poor Yorick ! —I knew him, Horatio : a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy : he hath borne me on his back a thousand times ; and now, how abhorred my imagination is ! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips, that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now ? your gambols ? your songs ? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar ? Not one now, to mock your own grinning ? quite chapfallen ? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come ; make her laugh at that !

Again, look at the ease with which he rises out of the satirical into the serious, out of brilliant and bitter comedy into the sombre grandeur and sadness of tragedy. It seems to need but a single beat of his wing. Here is a magnificent instance from the " Vision of Judgment " (xxiii., xxiv.).

While thus they spake, the angelic caravan,
  Arriving like a rush of mighty wind,
Cleaving the fields of space, as doth the swan
  Some silvery stream (say Ganges, Nile, or Inde,
Or Thames, or Tweed), and 'midst them an old man
  With an old soul, and both extremely blind,
Halted before the gate, and in his shroud
Seated their fellow-traveller on a cloud.

But bringing up the rear of this bright host,
  A Spirit of a different aspect waved
His wings, like thunder-clouds above some coast
  Whose barren beach with frequent wrecks is paved ;

His brow was like the deep when tempest-tossed;
Fierce and unfathomable thoughts engraved
Eternal wrath on his immortal face,
And where he gazed a gloom pervaded space.

Independent of his natural genius this force was due partly to his audacious openness. He was never restrained by any thought of what the world would say, while the gift of writing was upon him. What was in him emerged in a moment, and he did not alter it. Yet to say this is only to restate the fact of his power, of his born spirit and life.

It is perhaps better to give as a truer cause of the continuity of his power, that he had an instinctive knowledge of what he could do, and kept himself within his limits. There are poems of his which are weak, but their weakness arises from want of care about the subject. Again, the Dramas are not dramatic. There, in the clash of human passion with human passion, in their contrast, in impersonation, in development of characters and means to the catastrophe, he has but little capacity; but the poetry itself, if we do not consider it dramatic, is full of his inventive strength; that is, wherever in the drama he is writing himself into the character, he is powerful: wherever he has to efface himself in order to create a character, he is weak. He is a good soliloquist, but a bad dramatist.

But with these exceptions he rarely attempted that which he could not do. Effort was unknown to him, and to read verse which is wholly effortless impresses us with a sense of power. It is only afterwards, on the second or third reading, or when we read his poetry out, that we find that the force of which we are conscious is not backed up by enough of noble or imaginative

thought, by enough of true and passionate feeling to make the impression of force continuous.

There was also another element in his nature which ministered to this force of his. It was his acceptance of, his gloomy belief in, the intellectual system of Calvinism. He hated its doctrines with all his soul, but he believed in them. When he brought the doctrine of reprobation into contact with himself and felt himself —in accordance with it—isolated, as Manfred is from mankind, a doomed being, he had a grim liking for the position; and the force of much of his personal poetry is derived from the clear forcefulness of this position. It is the position of Satan in "Paradise Lost." "I am lost, but all is not lost, the unconquerable will remains, immortal hate, courage not to submit or yield." It is not fully that, by any means. Byron had not the power to be Milton's Satan, as he had not the power to be Milton. He is often no more than a Scapin; but sometimes he rises, as in "Cain," into the dignity of that false position. Moreover, the logical strength of the Calvinistic theory—and no theory has more logic if its premises are granted, and more grim strength if it is believed—communicated some of its power to a man whose genius was forcible, and whose mind was fond of clear intellectual statement. Indeed, there is as strict a relation between force of style and limitation of speculation, as there is between weakness of style and unlimited speculation. Byron and Shelley are excellent examples of both statements. Only we must not confuse force of style with influence over men. In clearness of style, Shelley was inferior to Byron, in power over the heart he is infinitely his superior.

Moreover there is another thing which may be said.

Byron loved the clear-headedness of the eighteenth century. He was a student of Pope, and chiefly liked him because his meaning, he thought, was always luminous. In this school Byron attained to clearness, and a blessed thing it is for the readers of a poet. It is one of our great pleasures in reading him, it is one of the reasons we feel power in his work, that we are never in doubt about what he intends to say. He held, and justly, that the artist should take the trouble to make himself easily understood, for the sake of art, for the sake of the English tongue, and for the sake of his audience. And I trust that the new interest which is being taken in his work[1] is a prophecy that after the extravagance of spasmodic schools, after the metaphysical thorn-bushes into which others have pushed us, wherein we have been so much troubled, after the labyrinthine and rough paths over which we have been forced to walk with a kind of outworn despair of discovering to what they lead, we may have a reaction in favour of the usage of the vehicle of verse to express and not to darken thought. A great deal of our poetry wants exactly what it wanted before Dryden and Pope took its style in hand—a restoration to clearness of thought, to lucid force of expression, to some pitiful care for the brains of the public. We are, I trust, becoming more and more impatient of riddles, and angry with the rugged rocks and dark ravines through which we are driven to labour. I maintain that the pleasures of art ought not to be made the pleasures of the Alpine Club.

The next matter to consider is—How did he describe Nature and what relation did he bear to her? He, like

[1] Written in 1887.

the others of his time, sought to come into solitary contact with external Nature, to realise and to describe what he saw, but in this relation what he chiefly did was to describe how the beauty and sublimity of Nature affected himself. He sought Nature in order to find himself. Could he with his keen eye, and power of grasp, have but seen and spoken of Nature without always returning to Byron, in which self-return his eye grew dim, and his grasp of the outward weakened, we should have had from him such clear objective pictures as would have charmed those of us who are tired of descriptions afflicted with emotion, or which display a philosophy. In fact, Byron's descriptions of Nature would have been better if he had had even a philosophy of Nature, for then he would not in touch with her have been conscious of himself alone. He describes throughout without any sense, such as his companion poets had, of a life in Nature separate from his own. Wordsworth thought of a living spirit in the world, distinct from man, whom man could love. Shelley imagined the universe as pervaded by a spirit of love, as inhabited by living forms; Coleridge thought of it as made living by our own life transferred to it; Cowper looked on it as the image of the character of God. Byron had none of these thoughts. Nature was a fine assemblage of phenomena, without any idea behind them, and their chief use was to reveal Byron to Byron. Hence there is no underlying unity in his descriptive poetry which might enable us to illustrate or intensify within ourselves one description of his by another, which binds each to each in natural piety. Every description stands alone, save for the consistent figure of Byron, always in gloomy dominance.

Owing to this there is no impression made by any of his descriptions that he loved Nature wholly for herself; nor are we ever in contact with that kind of passion in which a man loses all sense of self in love of beauty—no, not even when he is most moved, as in the storm among the Alps. He cannot feel truly either the sadness which we impose on Nature, or the joy that is itself in Nature. He keeps, for example, all the sadness to himself, and the result is that in his poetry Nature is never tender. He might have given to us, had he the heart to feel it, something of the beauty of the sorrow of Venice, some touch of the spirit of exiled romance which the sun and the lagoons weave together in their soft, sweet interchange of light, but we find nothing of it in "Childe Harold," nothing but well-expressed commonplace; nothing of it even in the famed description in "Marino Faliero." It is true that when he gets towards the South from Venice there is a description of a sunset in which he strikes the keynote of the fading and faded splendours of Italy, but it is inspired by himself and not by Nature. He has been feeling like "a ruin among ruins," and the sadness of the evening is his own morbid passion which he forces on the sunset. And he is punished for it. For having made it as lovely and as pure as an angel's thought, he ends it by a terrible anticlimax, and compares it to a dying dolphin! That is the Nemesis which follows on that so-called love of Nature which is not much better, save at rare moments, than love of self.

Nor could he get good to himself from the joy of Nature. Geneva, brightest almost of all cities, surrounded by scenery as brilliant as it is soft and thrilling; its lake a liquid sky; its sky trembling with the love

of its own light; its river, flowing and flashing sapphire so clear that where it falls its spheres of water and air are not foam, but amethystine light—is the scene of one of Byron's most passionate outcries against men and the life of men. It is not the mere sadness which a woeful man might fairly feel in contrast with this beauty, it is consuming bitterness of satiety. He takes his own gloom, which he says he puts away, but which, in truth, he hugs to his breast, and he makes it into a scorn of the "crushing crowd," the "peopled desert" of life in cities. He declares that he has lost himself in Nature, that this absorption is life, that the love of mountains, waves and skies is deep in his heart, but there is no reality in it; these are expressions he wears, but does not feel. Nature has done nothing for him, for he sees only in her a fresh impulse to despise the world.

> Should I not contemn
> All objects if compared with thee?

So he stands alone, over against all Humanity on one side, over against all Nature on the other; utterly isolated and joyless. The placid lake, the fierce storm, the lovely evening, are Byronised. He changes them into the pictured passions of his own soul:

> Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings! ye!
> With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
> To make these felt and feeling, well may be
> Things that have made me watchful; the far roll
> Of your departing voices, is the knoll
> Of what in me is sleepless,—if I rest.
> But where of ye, O tempests! is the goal?
> Are ye like those within the human breast?
> Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high nest?

Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me,—could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe—into *one* word,
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
But as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.
("Childe Harold," Canto III. 96, 97.)

It is finely written, part of it is superb, but what a different thing it is from Wordsworth's joy as he roamed up the glen beside the brook—"alive to all things yet forgetting all"; from Shelley's passion—"dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing."

It is almost always the same till we come to "Don Juan." Even at the end of descriptions which seem for the time to be sincere, the mocking, morbid self which does not even believe in its own disease, but wears it as an actor wears his paleness, comes gliding in to spoil the whole. It is even ridiculous, often, in spite of his power:

Then to see
Thy valley of sweet waters were to know
Earth paved like Heaven—and to seem such to me
E'en now what wants thy stream?—That it should Lethe be!

That is simply ludicrous!

Nevertheless we must always remember that this was a wilful wearing of a mask. Rousseau was actually a sentimentalist, but Byron assumes the false air of the ruined heart. He was manly and sincere enough, and it was all the wickeder of him to masquerade in this fashion. When he forgot all about his acting and wrote with his eye on the scene he was describing,

really and naturally pleased with it, the vividness of drawing is delightful. The brilliant light on everything, the joyful clearness, are Athenian. Here for example is the portrait of Clitumnus :

> But thou, Clitumnus ! in thy sweetest wave
> Of the most living crystal that was e'er
> The haunt of river nymph, to gaze and lave
> Her limbs where nothing hid them, thou dost rear
> Thy grassy banks whereon the milk-white steer
> Grazes ; the purest god of gentle waters !
> And most serene of aspect, and most clear ;
> Surely that stream was unprofaned by slaughters—
> A mirror and a bath for Beauty's youngest daughters !
>
> And on the happy shore a Temple still,
> Of small and delicate proportion, keeps,
> Upon a mild declivity of hill,
> Its memory of thee ; beneath it sweeps
> Thy current's calmness ; oft from out it leaps
> The finny darter with the glittering scales,
> Who dwells and revels in thy glassy deeps ;
> While, chance, some scattered water-lily sails
> Down where the shallower wave still tells its bubbling tales.
> (" Childe Harold," Canto IV. 66, 67.)

It is a little spoiled, but yet how luminous it is ! There is one still better, more sustained in " Manfred," of the Coliseum, and it is woven with the dying mood of the speaker, in that strange hour of calm which often, after much trouble, comes before death :

> The stars are forth, the moon above the tops
> Of the snow-shining mountains. . . .
> . . . on such a night
> I stood within the Coliseum's wall,
> Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome ;
> The trees which grew along the broken arches
> Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars

Shone through the rents of ruin; from afar
The watch-dog bayed beyond the Tiber; and
More near from out the Cæsar's palace came
The owl's long cry, and, interruptedly,
Of distant sentinels the fitful song
Began and died upon the gentle wind.
Some cypresses beyond the time-worn breach
Appeared to skirt the horizon, yet they stood
Within a bow-shot. . . .
And thou didst shine, thou rolling moon, upon
All this, and cast a wide and tender light
Which softened down the hoar austerity
Of rugged desolation, and filled up,
As 'twere anew, the gaps of centuries
Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
And making that which was not, till the place
Became religion, and the heart ran o'er
With silent worship of the great of old.
("Manfred," Act III. Sc. iv.)

There Byron has lost himself. He is neither mocking nor untrue; and he has seen the landscape as it is and grouped it well. "Grouped it well." That is another power he has when he is painting Nature. His descriptions are composed like pictures; the various features of the landscape touched in, with due subordination, and the figures introduced placed so firmly and clearly that one might paint the scene. I do not think that this is good poetic art. We ought not to be able to reproduce in painting the picture made by poetry. Each art has its own elements and they ought not to be capable of transference. But Byron does this kind of work with such extraordinary power, when he does it best, that we forgive him. He shows this power in the series of pictures drawn in the "Dream." In the midst of all stands or reposes the solitary Dreamer, one dark figure, apart. It is too theatrical, but it is

excellently clear, it lives and breathes before the eyes. Here is one of the passages :

> A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
> The Boy was sprung to manhood : in the wilds
> Of fiery climes he made himself a home.
> And his soul drank their sunbeams : he was girt
> With strange and dusky aspects ; he was not
> Himself like what he had been ; on the sea
> And on the shore he was a wanderer ;
> There was a mass of many images
> Crowded like waves upon me, but he was
> A part of all ; and in the last he lay
> Reposing from the noontide sultriness,
> Couched among fallen columns, in the shade
> Of ruined walls that had survived the names
> Of those who reared them ; by his sleeping side
> Stood camels grazing, and some goodly steeds
> Were fastened near a fountain ; and a man
> Clad in a flowing garb did watch the while,
> While many of his tribe slumbered around :
> And they were canopied by the blue sky,
> So cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful,
> That God alone was to be seen in Heaven.
>
> (" The Dream," iv.)

On the whole we have not from him when he works on Nature what we ought to have had. Neither his passion which was often sincere, nor his power which was always present, had their full scope. This failure was increased by the baleful theological opinions which he had accepted. They darkened his own soul, they darkened his view of man and of God, of man whom he despised, of God whom he feared and hated by turns, and this darkness would not enable him to have any noble natural communion with Nature.

It was increased also by the persistent way in which he chose to do wrong. For Byron never could kill his

conscience. His better nature rose continually out of the foul pit in which he plunged it, and made him angry with his own baseness, till he passed into a weak remorse. And the baseness of the remorse alike prevented any gladness with the beauty of the universe. He never saw "the light that never was on sea or land." He wished often to see it when his soul was not corrupted by worldliness and vanity, but he could not. He never gained the humble heart nor lived the simple life; and so he never inherited the earth.

I pause now to remark upon this strong but unreflective personality which is displayed under so many different masks in the poems, and to consider the results it had on English society.

It is this sombre, stage personality which interests us at first. Afterwards, when we come to know the man better, the stage personality gives place to the real one, and in that also we are interested. Off the stage and on the stage Byron has the attraction of audacious and boyish power. There are six lines in "Lara" which describe himself, and which seem to prove that he was conscious of the attraction he exercised over men:

> You could not penetrate his soul, but found,
> Despite your wonder, to your own he wound;
> His presence haunted still; and from the breast
> He forced on all unwilling interest:
> Vain was the struggle in that mental net,
> His spirit seemed to dare you to forget!

We read his poems, and we hear a man confessing everything about himself to us with the conviction that it must interest us, and with the power of saying it in an interesting manner. But after a time we are

wearied with Byron, just as Byron was with himself. There is too much of it, and it is too much the same; and if it is sincere, which we begin to doubt, it has not that first virtue of sincerity, variety. When we read his life we find out that this blighted being was not so blighted after all. We hear of "Lara" written in the year of wild revelry at Venice, and some of it while undressing at a masquerade, and the inspiration suggests an exhausted body rather than an embittered soul. It is with a smile of incredulity that we read lines like these, written when he was wasting his life with courtesans:

> The day drags on, though storms shut out the sun;
> And so the heart will break, yet brokenly live on.

Alack, we cry, it is after all the vanity of a boy, and the strong personality is that of a boy who did what he liked. And so it was. Byron did not reach manhood in this world, the manhood which has learned self-restraint for the sake of high purposes. He was entering it when he died. He was drawing towards it in his last great poem, the greatest poem he wrote. In "Don Juan" he has got rid of sentimentalism, though it has changed into mockery of mankind. But then this mockery is one of the necessary stages through which a man passes out of the evil of self-sentimentalism. Every one knows, how when we are leaving behind, outwearied with it, our youthful Byronism, if we ever catch the disease, we take to scoffing for a bit. When we are despising ourselves, it is natural to despise the world. The cynic within is the cynic without. But the new stage has this vast advantage over the stage of sentimental wailing over our destiny. It is true, and

being true we get rid of it more easily. It is less trouble to escape from an evil in which we are true to ourselves than from one in which we are false to ourselves. Byron wearied before long of the tone of "Don Juan," and the fact is that he did fling it away. It was not only real desire to support the Greek against the oppressor which drove him from Italy. It was also an unutterable boredom with himself, with all that he was doing, with the whole temper of his soul.

In "Don Juan" also, and it is another proof of his progress, all that imposition of his own self on Nature is gone. The descriptions are faithful, direct, written on the spot; wholly untainted with the Rousseau flavour, and though there is no sense in them of a living Being in Nature, there is no Byron either in her. The world of men and women in it is also described as it is, and Byron, instead of standing apart from humanity, throws himself headlong into its midst, and describes it with the greatest gusto, with satiric humour, but nevertheless with complete good humour. He is miles distant from Childe Harold, the "ruin among ruins," from Manfred, "the pathless comet," from the Corsair, "chained to excess, the slave of each extreme," from Lara, "a thing of dark imaginings," in whom there was "a vital scorn of all." He is at home in the world. It was a mean, immoral, selfish, conventional world he described, and he lashed it unsparingly. But it was an actual world. And he grasped it not only on one side, but on many. We are carried over many cities, and through many experiences, over land and sea, from Spain to the Cyclades, from the Golden Horn to St. Petersburg, from St. Petersburg to London; shipwreck and war, courts and

country life. The varied drama of mankind is shown. This is not the Byron that we knew. It is another man, and he is among men, sincere at last; and if cynical, yet we feel that the cynicism will pass away. We have one proof of that in the poem—the idyll on the Cyclades—the love of Juan and of Haidée. It is touched throughout with tenderness. Byron loved it himself. It is love as it might be in an island of the Southern seas, pure and innocent in Haidée, made pure in Juan by her purity, love which, innocent of law and of sin, was innocent, and took the whole world into its beauty. Yet, because it was not bound by law, Byron, in that inexorable way he has at times, destroyed it; and Haidée suffers death, but death which was kindly. I trace no cynicism in that episode. It is freed from the curse. I trace no Byronism in it, but it is full of Byron's better soul. He was coming into touch with tender and true humanity.

I have said that Byron represents, with Shelley and Keats, the revolt from the apathy and materialism which followed upon the temporary death of the revolutionary ideas in England after Waterloo, and I turn now to speak of him in this connexion.

In all his works up to "Don Juan" we have the revolt of a powerful personality against the lifelessness, the indifference and the materialism of the world which surrounded him, a world exhausted, as I have said, by all that it had gone through. Byron took refuge from it in considering his own character, his wrongs, his aspirations. There at least, he thought, is a world in full disturbance, in full revolt, questioning, theorising, wooing Nature to its embrace, like Rousseau,

attacking religion, like the philosophers of the eighteenth century, living as it pleased, independent of laws, sacrificing all its enemies. None can tell in adequate terms Byron's enormous self-admiration—admiration chiefly of his own ruins. Since he had no Revolution in France to excite him, he saw in his own soul the reign of terror and the decay. This was the way in which the exhaustion of the world first wrought in him, this was the first character of his revolt from it.

But he finally exhausted this state of things. Like France itself, he got sick of himself, and then the revolutionary element in him appears in a deliberate attack on the mean, immoral, selfish, conventional, and decaying world of which he formed a part in 1819. It is not cynicism so much as indignant scorn which really underlies "Don Juan." In it he expresses the revolt against selfish, tyrannical, and rich respectability, against shams and accredited falsehoods. And in this he did excellent revolutionary work, though in a manner which we regret.

There are few sins which corrupt a nation so fast as the sins the respectable classes fall into when, like Jeshurun, they wax fat. When decency and order get down into pride of wealth, sacrifice of all the ideals which impassionate the soul, of all the beautiful things which exalt and console it, for the sake of getting money, mean artifices to rise in society, slavishness to rank and display, the adoration of mere analysis, and of laws of economy which men have made for the purpose of gaining and keeping wealth, joy in luxury as if luxury were art, malice to opponents, bitter condemnation of the sinner when he is found out, protection of the sinner as long as he is received in society,

reckless competition in everything which pertains to money, and the glorification of this villainy, national isolation which does not care a straw for the larger interests of humanity, nay, which opposes them if those interests clash with England's financial interests, national and domestic worship of the Goddess of Getting-on, and the overwhelming dullness and hatefulness of life which follows on these things—then it is high time to have a man like Byron who will mock at the whole matter, who will lift the painted veil, and pointing to the corruption within, cry out, "Enough and to spare of this."

Only it ought to be said, as he did not say it, without endangering a true morality. In him, the reaction flew into its extreme, and we were in danger of being shocked back again into Pharisaism. But he did his work. The cry he raised against conventional morality, the ruthless fashion in which he exposed its sins, the boldness with which he defied public opinion, and laughed at its claim that all men should trim their coats according to its pattern, rejoiced a large number of persons who were horrified by his life, and shocked by his writings. They blamed the man, but they were secretly pleased with his revolt.

These persons grew and prevailed, and in the midst of the vast sameness of the middle class, an element of personal originality, rebellion against uniformity, arose, and saved society from mortal stupidity. Byron was one of the leading spirits in this revolution. I do not praise, no one can praise, the way he worked, but putting that aside, we owe him thanks. He produced, some say, only eccentricity, but eccentricity is better than a dead level, and the tendency of eccentricity is

to correct itself and to leave a residue of true originality. That young gentlemen should think themselves Corsairs or Giaours was a dark imagining which life was certain to correct, and the world would be all the better for that imagining of theirs when it had been corrected. For they would be the better. Their medicine, law, and science might fall to pieces for a time, but some personal character would be developed, and that is of far more importance to the country than routine medicine, and plodding law. They would even for a space of time have got out of that groove in which so many persons, like worn-out railway carriages, run up and down all their lives. They would have realised another existence than their own, even in folly, and the end, when they lost the folly, would have left them richer and the world more wealthy. Absolute satisfaction with oneself and one's place is not the same as sweet content. True content has aspiration. The life Byron attacked has none. It is not bad for a man who is born beside a pool, and content with his watercresses, to be carried away some day to see the great ocean, and the ships that sail to worlds unknown. He is not satisfied any more with his pool, but he is the more noble for the vision he has seen; and at least he makes such a disturbance henceforth in the pool as to make his neighbours uneasy and to keep the waters from stagnating; nor does he care any more for the uplifted finger of his small society, and its voice saying "Hush, do not make so much noise, do not disturb my sacred grove where all my gods are sound asleep."

Of this kind of thing Byron was a centre. He sent the passion of his revolutionary feeling through half

the English world. He sent it thrilling also through the Continent. He was a great power in this fashion for good, though it had been better if he had done it with more reflection. Had he lived he would have done so. He was, when he died, leaving behind him the falsehood of extremes. He still felt unhappy, still thought of his woes, but not in the same way. He put them aside for the sake of the cause of freedom, the cause for which he died. When a man dies for anything but self we forgive him all his follies, all his sins. And Byron had begun to forgive himself. He felt the past had been not the past of a man. He threw it aside, that he might realise what manhood was. His personality asserted itself with nobility at last. I close this chapter with the poem he wrote at Missolonghi, on reaching his thirty-sixth year. It speaks of a new man, and as we read it we feel for him pity mingled with admiration, and, far off, the sense of love :

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it has ceased to move.
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love !

My days are in the yellow leaf ;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone ;
The worm, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone !

The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle ;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain.

But 'tis not *thus*—and 'tis not *here*—
  Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor *now*,
Where glory decks the hero's bier,
  Or binds his brow.

The sword, the banner, and the field,
  Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
  Was not more free.

Awake! (not Greece—she *is* awake!)
  Awake, my spirit! Think through *whom*
Thy life-blood tracks its parent-lake,
  And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,
  Unworthy manhood!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
  Of beauty be.

If thou regret'st thy youth, *why live?*
  The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the field, and give
  Away thy breath.

Seek out—less often sought than found—
  A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
  And take thy rest.

CHAPTER XII

BYRON'S "CAIN"

It was made an accusation against Byron's "Cain" when it was published, that it would "give great scandal and offence to pious persons in general, and be the means of suggesting the most painful doubts and distressing perplexities to hundreds of minds that might never otherwise have been exposed to such dangerous disturbance"; that the whole argument is directed against the goodness and power of the Deity and against the reasonableness of religion in general, and no answer is attempted; that this "argumentative blasphemy forms the staple of the piece."

And these phrases, which are Jeffrey's and studiously moderate from him, were as nothing to the storm of wrath which it evoked. The clergy were almost in mass against it, and the denunciation was so hot that its results have so far lasted to this time, that among those who know Byron's poems well, there are many who have never read "Cain." He defended it by saying that "Lucifer and Cain must speak in character, and that Milton had done much the same"; but though that is true, Jeffrey's reply that "the whole argument —an elaborate and specious one—is directed against the reasonableness of religion" disposes of that defence. It is plain enough that Byron meant to express his hatred of certain doctrines concerning the action of God and the origin of evil, and that his hatred of the

doctrines was all the deeper because he believed in them. He intended to make Lucifer and Cain have the best of the argument. If he had not believed in them, if he had said, "These things are lies," he might have had a better defence. He might have said, "I do not attack the goodness and power of God, but the false doctrines concerning His goodness and power that men have made, and I draw the legitimate conclusion of these doctrines that I may show how abhorrent they are to the conscience and the affections! Whatsoever is denied by these cannot be true of God, who gave us Conscience and Love. I do not attack the reasonableness of religion, but the frightful unreasonableness of that which is called religion; and I attempt no reply to the speeches of Lucifer and Cain, because, on their premisses, which are those of a certain theology, there is no reply to their statements. The God represented by this theology is a God whom it is natural to man to fear and hate. It is not God, then, nor religion, I attack, but a cruel theology which demoralises God and man, whose children in men's hearts are rebellion and despair. Nor do I rashly give scandal and offence to pious persons, or suggest painful doubts. If they are pious, much harm will not be done to them; if they have true faith, they will not be much pained with doubt; but I hold that the doctrines which I represent in their deformity are a scandal and offence to the whole of Christianity, that they place a stumbling-block in the way of thousands of men and women, so that they are driven, like Cain, to company with Lucifer rather than with God, and that the pain and misery they cause in those whom they have deprived of all belief, and driven either to wretchedness of unclean living, or to

the chill and lonely morality which is without God, is infinitely greater in quantity and in quality than any suffering or scandal which pious persons may feel, whose piety will soon heal their wounds. I do not want to raise doubts, to shock the calm of faith, to distress people at ease in Zion—it is a cruelty I would not willingly practise: but there are doctrines which make the religious few who are chosen and secure very comfortable indeed at the price of the misery of thousands who are told by the comfortable that they are damned. These doctrines are a libel upon God, and are spreading a corruption of religion which is all the more subtle and dangerous because it is loudly claimed to be religious. It is right, then, to neglect the pain a few must suffer for the sake of the salvation of the many, and one of the ways a poet like myself must act is not by argument against these views, but by an imaginative representation of their deformity, so that the whole force of emotion, from spirit, conscience, and heart, may be roused against them, and they be cast out of the Temple of Mankind."

That might have been Byron's defence, though, had he made it, he would have put it in more powerful phrases, and would not have allowed any element of gentleness into it. But he could not make that defence; he could not deny the doctrines. Therefore, there *was* an element of evil in this attack that he made; for it accepted the view that the Source of all Good was evil, and when it had proved Him evil, was content to leave the question there. It never occurred to him—he was thinking so much of his own anger and pain—to say that he was denying, *not* God, *but* a false idol which man had made out of Him; that when he

attacked this theology, it was to defend religion. The evil of Byron's work was that it cast out devils and put no divine thing in their place. It gave nothing to the soul to reverence and love, and that is even worse than reverencing and loving unworthy things. For it is the reverence and love that we want, and not so much that the views held should be absolutely right of tone. *Both* are best, but if we have love, we shall make good even out of views which seem not good. But if we have no love or reverence left, then the truest views are useless, even poison to us. We make evil out of them. And this is the fault of all those who to-day spend their time in doing nothing but taking away old beliefs without giving anything in their place. The result is vividly put by Christ, the result of having made an empty soul. " The unclean spirit, when he goeth out of a man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth it not. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first " (Matt. xii. 43–45).

That was the evil side of Byron's work in theological matters. The good side was that his work was another of those influences which tended to revolutionise theology, to make the existing views of God seem more and more unfit for a time when universal ideas on the subject of man in social and political realms called loudly for analogous views in religion. It is very well for Jeffrey to complain that discussion of the question of the origin of evil is the province of philosophy, not

of poetry, and that it is unfair to advance views which, by appealing solely to emotion, cannot be met in fair argument. He may complain, but the fact remains that religion is a matter which belongs chiefly to the emotions, and that the proper arguments to use on questions which pertain to it are arguments addressed to the emotions. These are the only arguments that tell in the long run. Poetry then does all this kind of work far better than philosophy, and is quite a legitimate sphere in which to conduct it. Of course, it may be answered that arguments mainly addressed to emotion are worthless in comparison with those addressed to the understanding. All I have to reply is that at least they have more result in matters of religion than those which belong to the understanding; that the fact is that, in the history of humanity, religious questions and movements have been settled by the one and not by the other; that such arguments which appeal to emotion are in the sphere of religion, that those which appeal to the understanding alone are not in its sphere; that in our personal life, if we desire to know and love God, and man as His child, we actually do take more count of a statement which satisfies our ideal than we do of a hundred statements which satisfy our understanding. So far as religion is concerned—and indeed in all matters except those which can be demonstrated: that is, in three-fourths of human life—the understanding is a poor guide; and the deification of it that prevails at present is one of the most melancholy misfortunes of society. Byron did more to overthrow, in his passionate wrath with them, the evil views of God as the Omnipresent Tyrant, and of original sin as the evil He had inflicted upon mankind,

in order to get men into His power that He might torment them, than was done by all the labours of philosophical theologians.

I turn now to the doctrines themselves in which he believed, and which he hated. The first was the doctrine of fatalism, as contained in the view that God was a Sovereign Power that could do as He pleased; that He had pleased to let all men sin in one; that He chose some to be saved for His own glory, and settled that the rest should be damned, also for His own glory.

Whatever subtleties of argument may be used with regard to the sovereignty of God, the result of that doctrine is fatalism. "I am lost," one man says. "I am saved," another says. "Nothing I can do, one way or another, changes the irreversible decree."

That was the first doctrine Byron held, and it was eminently capable of poetical development. It was in itself a poetic subject; and has always, though in various forms, been a mother of poetry. The Greek held that there was an Inexorable Destiny, beyond the limited movements of humanity, even beyond the gods, which could not be altered by prayer or effort. And in the struggle of the will of man against this outward destiny, and in either the crushing of the hero, while his will continued unsubdued, or in the gradual leading of the hero (through suffering) to attain peace By acquiescence in destiny, consisted the elements of that Greek tragedy in which we find the greatest poetry of the world. We have but to change a few things, and we have precisely the same elements for poetical treatment in the fatalism of Calvinism, the same dread destiny, only here it is called the Will of God, the same unavailing struggle, the same leading of the chosen

into acquiescence and peace, the same reprobation of the unchosen, and the same blind anger and ruin of the lost. These are elements which inevitably awaken passion; and in imaginative and creative minds that passion, whether it be wrath or despair, fear or fierce resolve, makes poetry. The emotions are so strong that they call forth the language of emotion; men of genius have that language ready to hand, and its highest form is poetry.

But there are two classes of poets who have worked on this idea of necessity, of a fate allotted to men which they cannot escape. There is, first, the poet who is not personally made angry and despairing by it. It becomes with him, as with Sophocles and Shakespeare, the ground-work on which he displays the labour and sorrow of idealised humanity. These are the great poets who, capable of feeling all they paint, feel it only up to the point at which perfect representation of it is possible, and are not so swept away themselves by any emotion as to become personal poets. They feel the doctrine of destiny in relation to others, but they do not feel it in relation to themselves, probably because they enter so much into the thought of mankind in relation to fate that they never enter into it themselves at all. It is quite different when we come to inferior men, on whom the doctrine of fate has a personal influence, whose lives it dominates. We have two examples of this in English poets. One is Cowper, the other Byron. On both it acted differently, in both it produced poetry and the emotion which is the source of poetry. Cowper felt himself doomed by the fateful will of God to eternal ruin. Here is the poem in which, at the beginning of his poetic life, he expressed his

despair and agony. It is human feeling at its most tragic height. No one can read it without sharing in its passion. No one who hears will deny that this doctrine is a cause of poetry:

> Hatred and vengeance,—my eternal portion
> Scarce can endure delay of execution—
> Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
> Soul in a moment.
>
> Damned below Judas, more abhorred than he was,
> Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
> Twice betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,
> Deems the profanest.
>
> Man disavows, and Deity disowns me,—
> Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
> Therefore, Hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all
> Bolted against me.
>
> Hard lot! encompassed with a thousand dangers,
> Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
> I'm called, if vanquished! to receive a sentence
> Worse than Abiram's.
>
> Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
> Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
> I, fed with judgment, in a fleshy tomb, am
> Buried above ground.

These awful Sapphics, and the equally awful poem of the "Castaway" at the end of his poetic life, are examples of the fierce poetry the doctrine of irreversible fate produces. For the emotions of despair—and those were Cowper's—at their height and in their vicissitudes are alike the causes of poetry. The position became still more poetical in another way when Cowper, believing himself doomed by the will of God, acquiesced

in that will, and bent in reverence before it, and resolved, though God had willed his eternal ruin, that he would not deviate from goodness, so far as his destiny would permit! In throwing that feeling into verse, he produced some of his noblest poetry. Indeed, no one can help feeling the tragic nobility of the situation. The inexorable fate. The man conscious of the waiting thunder. The despair—yet the acquiescence.

Byron, believing the same doctrine, met it in a wholly different manner. It woke in him bitter resentment. Byron's indignation was entirely selfish. He was angry because he was himself set apart for ruin; he had no moral feeling about the doctrine, and he did not care how it influenced man. Nor on the whole did he think the doctrine in itself immoral. God had a right to do this kind of thing if He pleased, but it gave Byron also the right, not to acquiesce like Cowper, but to express his wrath, to despise his fellow-men, to heap upon all things his scorn. He was doomed. What mattered what he said? God had condemned him; and since that was so, he would, when he liked, mock at God. This position, viewed from the outside, is not by any means so poetical or so tragic as Cowper's. Byron does not bear nobly the burden of his belief, he makes no effort against fate, he does not try to make the best of it, he does not keep his free will clear as long as he can; he is not Prometheus or Œdipus, but one who sinks, effortless, and overwhelmed, borne over the cataract.

Another tragic thing in his position is the waste of splendid powers, and the pity that it kindles.

The other theological doctrine that Byron held was that of original sin. It is a doctrine which has a fascination for some poets. Of course, you know that it

takes many forms; but we need to think of only two of them, for those two underlie all the work of two poets—of Browning, and of Byron. The first I look at is the view which Browning accepts, "That original sin is not any kind of guilt, but a failure, an imperfection, a minus quantity in human nature, by which our intellect, our imagination, our affections, conscience, and spiritual information are limited. So that when they strive to get beyond their barriers, to bring anything on earth to perfection, they break down into failure. But the failure on earth is to tell us that our life must not find satisfaction on earth, but shall find in a better land perfection and victory among perfect things."

This is not the view of Byron, but it is clearly capable of poetical treatment. Nay, it is itself poetical. It creates thought, and the thought is of that kind that gives birth to strong and imaginative emotion. Let me mark the position clearly. You will see what a mighty subject it is for verse, with a thousand side issues which take in vast ranges of human act, and half of human feeling. God has determinately made us imperfect, with a fault in our nature, whereby the intellect cannot grasp the substance of half that it conceives, nor language enshrine the fancies that escape us, nor the hand realise the visions the artist sees, nor the mind ripen instincts it is half conscious of, nor any inspiration of youth fulfil itself, nor even the senses thrill with the fullness of the joy they only touch to find it gone. Who that cares for Browning's poetry does not know that this conception is at the root of it all, even almost to wearisome iteration? "For this is our fate," he thinks, "to be disturbed for ever by spiritual touches which

bid us ceaselessly aspire beyond the barriers which darkly close us in; and yet when we strive to realise our aspiration in knowledge, beauty, pleasure, to find ourselves beaten back from the barrier into failure, bitterly conscious that we can never attain our hope on earth, but driven by the very bitterness to look beyond the earth, and at last to feel that in this very failure is our best success, that what we aspired to be, and were not, comforts us, that the only thing which is real ruin, having in it unutterable woe and disgrace for our immortal nature, is success on earth and contentment with success, is finding all we want and desiring no more." To succeed at all we must work within our limitations, but woe to the man who, having worked within them, does not feel the gadfly sting which urges him for ever on, a wanderer to a higher land. He will be a brute, and not a man. But having this faulty, imperfect nature, and having God as builder and Father of our life, and having from Him these

> Fallings from us, vanishings,
> High instincts before which our mortal nature
> Doth tremble . . .

what follows?—that, if we do not mistake God's meaning and, in resolving to aspire no longer, find contentment here; that if we do not take the world and ask no more; that if, on the contrary, we take our failures here as the pledge of infinite beauty, knowledge, and love which wait for us in God, and pass undismayed and striving from failure to failure;—then that He is bound to make the faulty faultless, the imperfect perfect, that He will amend the flaws, and mould the clay to the finished cup. He will complete not only

the man's work, which the world sees, but also all the dreams and hopes, and air-built castles of imagined good and loveliness which only came and went and died like a breath on polished silver. Thus, at the close of Abt Vogler's musings :

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee, who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is nought; is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs, in the heaven, a perfect round.

This is the conclusion Browning brings forth from his doctrine of original sin; and on the working out of it the whole of his poetry is built.

It draws after it, you see, all the emotion which a poet feels, face to face with the general problem of human faultiness and its meaning, and its answer—face to face with all the multitudinous varieties of human failure,—and with these, all the profounder emotions which arise, when he sees, glancing through the gloom of the original imperfection, like fireflies through a cypress grove in Italy, the flashes, the gleams, of the perfection which will be wrought out of the imperfection, of the eternal good, the eternal beauty, which every half-sin, and every half-failure, prophesy.

This, then, is a cause of poetry.

Byron did not hold that view of original sin, but he held another, and that other underlies all his serious poetry. It was a ghastly view, the Augustinian theory that when Adam sinned, his sin, with all its conse-

quences, was handed down to all his descendants, imputed to them by God; so that men were under the condemnation of God, and everlasting ruin their fitting portion, not only for the wrong they did consciously, but for the evil nature they had received from their first parent. Infants, then, who could neither think or speak, were the children of the devil. In this vile and abominable doctrine he believed, while he hated it. While he rebelled against it, he accepted it.

> Our life is a false nature; 'tis not in
> The harmony of things,—this hard decree,
> This ineradicable taint of sin,
> This boundless upas, this all-blasting tree,
> Whose root is earth, whose leaves and branches be
> The skies which rain their plagues on men like dew—
> Disease, death, bondage—all the woes we see,
> And worse, the woes we see not, which throb through
> The immedicable soul, with heart-aches ever new.
>
> (" Childe Harold," Canto IV. 126.)

This was his view, and one might rashly call it not poetical. But the conception itself has an awful tragedy in it, for we see a mighty Being pavilioned in mystery, irresponsible in power, whom none dare question, none approach to, who claims to be believed as good, yet seems to do evil. And He has created a lovely world, and in it allowed a race of noble creatures to live and work and think and feel, and to do all passionately. And the first of these that he made, He made in joy and innocence, but allowed them the free will to sin, without the strength to resist. And they sinned. And so awful was the one guilt that God said it shall be reckoned as guilt to all the millions which shall come from them: " My world is cursed, My humanity is ruined. In one brief hour eternal wrong has been wrought. Eternal evil is

born. I shall choose and save a few; but for the rest there is no hope. I abandon them for endless eternities to fear and hate, and self-despair, and deepening impurity."

It is a hateful doctrine. But hateful as it is, no one can deny its poetic sublimity, the horror and the pity of a great tragedy. And as such Byron saw it and conceived it, represented man as overwhelmed by it, as resisting it, mourning for it, and mocking at it.

And more, it was the source of poetical subjects. It brought in its train insoluble problems in which imagination could never weary of wandering, where she found, too, that which multiplied the more it was consumed. How was it that Him whom we were bound to think of as goodness we were forced to think of as evil? Why was that which we felt to be goodness in man most often the path by which he found evil? Was immortality, for which man blindly longed, with a longing which seemed to him the most noble of things within him, his greatest curse, his greatest wrong, for so would be surely an immortality which can be his only that he might more certainly taste the gall of evil for ever, and with the evil have pain for ever? Are not these things and many more creative of poetry? Let Dante and Milton answer!

Lastly, with all these tragic questions—each a source of poetic emotion—came yet one more dreadful thought. It was the thought of a world steeped in sorrow to the lips. There, year after year, the earth was filled with the misery of unspeakable failures. There was the vision of the Pale Rider pitilessly slaying, and of those he slew passing into a merciless hell. There was the vision of Time, the dark destroyer, overwhelming

memories, passions, hopes, faiths, love, all the glory which was only born to flash and perish. There was the vision of the whole world sick and wearied, yet battling on, in courage that might make a pagan god repent, but which had no power to move the Christian God.

How they got it out of the teaching of Jesus, none can tell. It is a vision born of all that is most evil in the heart of man. Yet, in its untheological aspect, seen only as a subject for art, it is poetical to its depths, and creative of poetry. He who saw this might well look on mankind as Kent looked on Lear, the " foolish, fond old man," and cry in thought to which none could give form in prose :

> Vex not his ghost ; O, let him pass ! he hates him much
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer. . . .
>
> He but usurped his life.

This was the vision and the thought of Byron. Its fitting representation was in poetry. He believed in it, and he abhorred it ; and the whole drama of " Cain " is dedicated to his faith and his abhorrence.

The drama is an indictment of the doctrine of Calvinistic fatalism and the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, an indictment charged with abhorrence of them, and yet bearing in it proof—a proof confirmed by the rest of Byron's poetry—that he could not get rid of them, could not deny them. The indictment, then, is all the more powerful. It is a man rebelling against his own belief.

It opens with a service of thanksgiving to God in which all join but Cain. He is silent in sullen indignation, in hidden misery. " Hast thou nought to thank

God for?" "No," he answers. "Dost thou not live?" asks Adam. "Must I not die?" replies Cain, touching on one root of his misery. "Why didst thou not pluck the tree of life, and so have been able to defy God?" And Eve starts back in dismay, and, warning him, begs him to be content with that which is. As if he could! What use to bid such souls to be content? One does not say to the sea driven by the wind, "Be calm." Of all the things said by pious persons who have natural faith to those who are naturally sceptical that is the most frequent, the most irritating, and the most foolish. And it is founded on the worst of errors a teacher can commit in religious education, "the opinion that scepticism is a crime," an opinion, however, which is a logical inference from the Low Church theory of theology.

Then Cain, left alone, breaks out:

> Life! Toil! and wherefore should I toil?—Because
> My father could not keep his place in Eden.
> What had *I* done in this?—I was unborn:
> I sought not to be born; nor love the state
> To which that birth has brought me. Why did he
> Yield to the serpent and the woman? or,
> Yielding, why suffer? What was there in this?
> The tree was planted, and why not for him?
> If not, why place him near it, where it grew,
> The fairest in the centre?—They have but
> One answer to all questions,—"'Twas His will
> And *He* is good." How know I that? Because
> He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow?
> I judge but by the fruits—and they are bitter—
> Which I must feed on for a fault not mine.

How well we know it! "God is an irresponsible monarch. His will—and not right—makes His only law. We have no right to question it, though it seems

wholly unjust. Our goodness is absolute submission, even to that which seems evil. Though it appears unjust that we should be condemned as guilty for guilt not ours, but Adam's, we are yet to call it just!" What wonder that, holding this, men have asked, " Is power necessarily good? Are we to bend to mere might, and not right?" What wonder if men ask, " Why was I born? I did not ask to be brought into this suffering, and I will not bear it patiently. There is nothing to love in all that is told me, and I am miserable because I cannot love." What wonder that thousands, in horror and anger, believing that this is a true representation of God, rush into infidelity, atheism, anything! For everything in more than half of mankind contends against such doctrines, and rightly so, I think. And there are only two things possible for those who believe in God, who do not become atheists: either to find another and nobler theology, or to become like Cain, like Byron—an outcast, and a rebel against their own belief.

And observe, it is by no means the worst, but those whom we would call the best material of mankind who feel thus. Byron has a right instinct in making Cain originally a lovable and noble character. Cain honours his father, he loves Abel, he worships the beauty and the character of his wife. To him Adah is all the world, and should her beauty perish he would love her still. He feels his superiority to Lucifer in that he can love. The chief horror of the doctrine of original sin to him, of the curse his father sends down, is the misery which his descendants will suffer. Adam, Eve, Abel, do not think of mankind—Cain does. He loves life and hates death as its cessation, and yet would die could he save posterity from his own suffering. He loves all that is

beautiful, he lingers round the gates of Eden to catch the loveliness of Paradise. The loveliness of Ether and its worlds wakens in him thoughts not unworthy of his immortality. So he might see their beauty nearer he is content to die. His eyes fill with pleasant tears as he sees the indescribable setting of the sun, his heart floats softly into the clouds and listens happily to the song of birds as the day dies behind the gates of Eden. He loses self in all that is beautiful and good. He will not believe in eternal evil, for he thirsts for good. He cannot believe that God Himself is happy, since He is the Maker of those doomed to an immortality of unhappiness. In all a noble, true, and lovable soul.

And it is all these things in him, all that is clearly good in him, which rebel against the doctrine he is represented as believing: "That God's might makes His right to do what He will with man, for no end but His own glory," and "that He permitted a sin which entails on those who did *not* commit it eternal evil."

How has this, then, been answered; and this: that what is good is that which rebels? The dogmatic answer comes: "That these things are not good at all, that there is no spark of good in the unregenerate man, that these things called good are only splendid sins."

I call that detestable and evil teaching. Nothing is worse than to look at good and call it evil. It is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the only excuse is that it is taught in order to support a religious theory, and there is nothing which blinds like a religious theory. We are robbed of every standard of right and wrong when, for the sake of a dogma, a good thing is called a splendid sin! What *can* one expect in the case of thousands as

the result of this teaching, but that which follows it continually—immorality, often crime. It drives men into hatred of God, and hatred of life; and the worst of it is that in proportion as men are kind, just, loving, ready to believe, true to themselves, if at the same time they are aspiring, is the effect of them more ruinous. The great horror of such men is the horror of Cain. First, the horror of finding that which is called goodness, evil; and the misery (so unutterable to many) of the departure of the power of loving God. They are in the power of a mighty Being who does not love them, whom they, in turn, will not love; whom they feel they ought not to love. It is slavery, and they resent it. Yet they long to love God, and it is dreadful not to be able to love Him. Secondly, the horror of the unredeemable misery which is coming upon all mankind, and the worse misery of seeing it, and knowing that God has caused it without any remedial aim, only to make His power known, or what is called, in this connection, His justice, so that now, it is miserable not only not to love God, but also to be compelled to hate Him.

See how this appears in Cain's speech to his children:

> My little Enoch! and his lisping sister!
> Could I but deem them happy, I would half
> Forget—but it can never be forgotten
> Through thrice a thousand generations—*never*
> Shall men love the remembrance of the man
> Who sowed the seed of evil and mankind
> In the same hour! They plucked the tree of science
> And sin—and, not content with their own sorrow,
> Begot *me*—*thee*—and all the few that are,
> And all the unnumbered and innumerable
> Multitudes, millions—myriads—which may be,
> To inherit agonies accumulated
> By ages!—and *I* must be sire of such things!

It is the cry of thousands on whom tradition has imposed a doctrine which strips God of morality, but which they cannot—so strong is tradition on them—deny as religion.

Under these circumstances ruin comes to such a soul, and Byron, continuing his indictment, shows how it comes.

Cain is a soul made to know God, loving, and desiring good, forced by the morality of his own heart, in conflict with certain representations of God, to haughty rebellion against God, forced, where he ought most to love, to scorn and hate, turned devilish by having God made into a devil. For the highest love of the heart there is no channel left. What is the result? It is that not being able to love God, having nothing to employ the spirit upon, the whole man turns with a burning thirst to seek in the intellectual realm alone its food and its life. It is the natural and sorrowful end to which men are driven when they are deprived by bad theology of the power of loving God.

It is curious to see how Byron, who loved intellectual life, has treated this condition. It is curious to find that he makes knowledge, deprived of love, one of the factors in the ruin and crime of Cain. The result of knowledge, when love of God has vanished, is, in Byron's view, overwhelming pride, which resents all interference, which produces hatred of piety, and scorn of it, and, through both, deadly crime. The whole talk of Lucifer (in a long discussion with Cain—far too polemical to be poetical) is so couched and arranged by Byron that we see that he holds that science, without love, means increased moral weakness, increased power of doing wrong. For Lucifer mocks and gibes all through, not only at love of God, but at all human love, at Cain's love

for Adah and his children, at his affection for Adam and Abel, as if as long as love lasted in Cain he could not have power. And there is nothing finer in the play than the way in which, when no love of God is left in Cain's heart, yet his human affections do battle against the tempter and almost baffle his object. But the evil has been done. If love has not been crushed, it has been overwhelmed in the excitement of new knowledge, and Cain returns, having lived years in a few hours, thrilling with wild passion, in which there has been no emotion of the heart, except that of deepened indignation against a cruel God, and of consuming anger at his own fate. All reverence, gentleness, gratitude, humility, sense of sin have perished in him, all faith and love and hope. The one black upas of his belief in an inherited sin poisons the whole of life :

> Little deems our young blooming sleeper there,
> The germs of an eternal misery
> To myriads is within him ! better 'twere
> I snatch'd him in his sleep, and dash'd him 'gainst
> The rocks, than let him live to ——
> * * * * *
> 'Twere better that he ceased to live, than give
> Life to so much of sorrow as he must
> Endure, and, harder still, bequeath.

And full of this, his soul on fire with wrath, and full of new excitement,—" I have seen," he says,

> the dead,
> The Immortal—the Unbounded—the Omnipotent—
> The overpowering mysteries of space—
> The innumerable worlds that were and are—
> A whirlwind of such overwhelming things,
> Suns, moons, and earths, upon their loud-voiced spheres
> Singing in thunder round me, as have made me
> Unfit for mortal converse : leave me, Abel.

Thus excited, he returns and finds again the sad, dull, apathetic, pious life; thus indignant, he returns and finds Abel, the representative of the men who feel no difficulty, no doubt, but move along in unquestioning faith and submission, and he cannot endure it. It tortures him; and when his offering is rejected, and Abel's is accepted, his fury breaks out, and he wishes to avenge himself on God by hurling Abel's altar to the ground. Abel interferes in defence of God's altar. Cain, maddened, threatens his life; Abel answers that he loves God far more than life, and in a moment of maniacal fury Cain strikes him down.

> Then take thy life unto thy God,
> Since He loves lives.

It is done in a moment of impulse, but it is done because there has been nothing left to revere, nothing left to love; because when pride and hate and scorn are alone left in the soul, they multiply, till in their seething passion, all things are lashed to passion, and the smallest touch of opposition to the pride, and the smallest grain of anger, swell in a moment into murder.

Let those look to it who teach doctrines which take goodness and love out of God, and out of the heart of man, and let them ask themselves what they are doing.

Cain is alone with the dead, and Zillah, hearing the heavy fall, comes in, sees Abel dead, and runs out, crying:

> Father!—Eve!—
> Adah!—come hither! Death is in the world!

Cain answers:

> And who hath brought him there? I—who abhor
> The name of Death so deeply . . .

So he reaches the last knowledge, the knowledge of death. And it is not joy, but terror and woe and despair; and he who broke his heart for ignorance, breaks it now for knowledge. The fate which doomed him from his birth, that chose him for ruin, the inward subtle curse of inherited sin, in spite of all the native goodness in the man, have worked their way, and he is lost. God's will, His sovereign will to destroy him, is done. That is how Byron represents it, and it is a ghastly comment on the doctrine. Nor does he leave this theory of original sin without its further evil developed. Once it has broken out of its citadel into the open, once it has realised itself in form, the results of belief in it leap to life in the others, induced like madness from one to the other. Adam, seeing the corpse, turns fiercely on his wife:

> Woman, behold the serpent's work, and thine!

Eve, losing motherhood for Cain in a passion of motherhood for Abel, denies her womanhood and curses with a hideous curse her eldest son. These are the fiery brood of the incarnate sin, and below on earth are the results, the speechless despair of Zillah's grief, and, incarnadining earth, the blood of Abel crying for vengeance—evil inevitable, hopeless evil, doomed to go on, doubling itself for ever. *This*, this, then, is the result of the day when all the Sons of God shouted for joy. For in Byron's picture there is no hope, no alleviation, no picturing of the good side. It is all misery and wrong, and the one faint allusion in the previous part of the poem to a redeemer is put aside almost contemptuously:

Adah. How know we that some such atonement, one day,
May not redeem our race?
Cain By sacrificing
The harmless for the guilty? What atonement
Were there? Why—*we* are innocent; what have we
Done, that we must be victims for a deed
Before our birth, or need have victims to
Atone for this mysterious, nameless sin—
If it be such a sin to seek for knowledge?

Another count in the indictment.

In all the scene there is only one bright spot. It is the love of Adah, who is saved by her love of Cain. The sin does not touch her—she has the talisman against it; and her unbroken, clinging affection is the single ray of hope that lights the scene. No tenderness is greater, and it is the more tender for the guilt and terror, than that which she has in her heart, when, with her child, she goes forth, not weeping, for her office is to dry tears, not to shed them, into the wilderness with the ruined man.

It is Byron's way of showing where the remedy lies for all the woes of earth.

And now, what of Cain himself? How does Byron treat the problem of crime? What effect has the sin on the criminal? This is a question he answers unconsciously in "Cain," consciously in "Manfred," and the unconscious answer is curiously different from the other. In "Cain" we plainly see that the crime has done good, or that which will be a far-off good to the man. In "Manfred" it is, and it does, evil. In "Cain" we see that it will be followed by healing repentance: in "Manfred" it is followed by consuming remorse. "Manfred" is the clearly conceived, consciously accepted view of Byron with regard to the result of crime; but in "Cain" he writes, as it were, out of himself.

He rises above himself to express higher truths than he was aware of—to contradict, in fact, by that which his inspiration as a poet makes him say, the belief that there are any who cannot be redeemed. We are made to feel that Cain is to be saved from himself, from his pride, from his lovelessness, from his false scorn of life. No sooner has he slain Abel than he is awakened to another world, to reality:

> I am awake at last—a dreary dream
> Had maddened me.

His crime has made life real, he is conscious of his true self, and of the real aspect of the world, because he is for the first time conscious of his own soul. Before, he had been conscious of his intellect, and its desires—a dreary dream—of home love, and the passions of human nature. Now, for the first time, through the gate of crime, he breaks into the spiritual world, the real, actual world, and finds himself touching realities, touching them in an awful manner, but yet knowing that they are the only true substantial things, that he has been living, as we all live, till we get into the Infinite, in shadows, in things like dreams.

> I am awake at last.

That is a curious end for Byron to reach, as it were unconsciously; but, strange as it is, Byron is right to fact, for it is sin that awakens half of the persons in the world, and unless men are brutalised or hypocrites, a great crime does the same. " This is a vision," cries Cain, as he looks on the dead, " else I am become a native of another and worse world."

Yes, he has become a native of another world, but not necessarily a worse world. Cain knew death, but

in knowing death he gained the still more awful knowledge of what human life really was, a grim battlefield, not of the intellect with the forces of nature, but of the eternal soul with evil. To him it was a peaceless knowledge, an intensity of restlessness, for he reached it, not through victory over evil, but through evil having mastered him; but it was knowledge of life, and in that knowledge the horror of death, which had troubled him while he only lived as in a dream, passed away.

Life—this overwhelming reality, this dread consciousness of being—this sense of the vast relations of being to eternal laws—this massive weight of duty, this awfulness of the punishment which violated duty brings with it—this vast eternity of thought, so infinitely vaster than all the universe he had seen—this is the inconceivable reality. And his one cry is, "Let me escape, let me die, let me take Abel's place." Yes, we long for death when we are wakened in this way—the terrible way of sin and shame—to the reality of life, and we cry out in our cowardice for death. But God does not give death *then*. We must go through with life, once we know it.

But Byron is right, the terror of death is gone when a man awakens to the true meaning of life, whether he awakens to it through being the victor or the victim of evil. And better such a waking, however won, even through crime, than the previous dream, for at least we know what we are, and do not imagine that we are only intellect, or only matter; better, too, even the waking of Cain to peaceless wandering, but conscious of his soul, than the loveless pursuit of knowledge in which the heart is killed, and the spirit paralysed. For the former is nearer redemption than the latter; the former has touched reality: the latter, though it boasts of

living among real things, has spent its life among phantoms; and before it can be brought to true life and manhood must recognise that the things of the understanding alone are by themselves dreams with which a dreamer plays.

Mark, too, how Byron makes Cain find God, or at least come to some knowledge of His character, through his crime. Before it, in the invocation at the sacrifice, in all the talk with Lucifer, he has evidently never conceived God as anything more than a hypothesis, who may have something to do with him, but with whom he can have little or nothing in common. Listen to this close of the invocation :

> If a shrine without victim,
> And altar without gore, may win Thy favour,
> Look on it ! And for him who dresseth it,
> He is—such as Thou mad'st him ; and seeks nothing
> Which must be won by kneeling : if he's evil,
> Strike him ! Thou art omnipotent, and may'st—
> For what can he oppose ? If he be good,
> Strike him, or spare him, as Thou wilt ! since all
> Rests upon Thee ; and good and evil seem
> To have no power themselves, save in Thy will ;
> And whether that be good or ill I know not,
> Not being omnipotent, nor fit to judge
> Omnipotence, but merely to endure
> Its mandate ; which thus far I have endured.

Not a single note in it that there is any vital relation between man and God ; but when the murder is committed, in the agony of his soul, then a different cry goes up—the old familiar cry of the agonised heart to its natural Master :

> Stir—stir—nay, only stir !
> Why, so—that's well !—thou breath'st ! breathe upon me !
> Oh, God ! Oh, God !

Before, it has been war, rebellion against cold and cruel Omnipotence. Now, it is at last the confession of a broken, humbled heart that God has the right to punish and forgive sin, and He can only have that right from innate goodness. He asks that God may take his life and give it to Abel; he speaks to Abel's spirit, saying,

> If *thou* see'st what *I* am,
> I think thou wilt forgive him whom his God
> Can ne'er forgive, nor his own soul.

This is a different note indeed from that of cold and fierce rebellion against a loveless Power. And with this personal knowledge of God, as having to do with him, as the rightful Lord of his soul, the clear sense of the difference between right and wrong, the sense of sin, the submission to punishment as just, arise in his heart. He who goes quietly into the wilderness, thinking that the four rivers could not cleanse his soul, with heaven and earth darkened round him, is very different from him who went, indignant, hard, with that pride in his own absolute right which leads to crime, into space with Lucifer: a changed being, because a conscious moral being, and as such, for the first time, though he knows it not, capable of redemption.

And Byron, always unconsciously, I think, makes us see that. For Cain has recovered love. Love is won in a terrible birth out of too late remorse.

"What shall I say to him?" he breaks forth, seeing Abel dead before him. "What shall I call him?"

> My brother! No:
> He will not answer to that name; for brethren
> Smite not each other. Yet—yet—speak to me.
> O, for a word more of that gentle voice,
> That I may bear to hear mine own again!

Hark to that piteous cry at the end!—in it perishes self-concentration.

Pride, the old pride—anger, the old anger—recur for a moment when the angel reproaches him:

> After the fall too soon was I begotten—
> Ere yet my mother's mind subsided from
> The serpent, and my sire still mourned for Eden.
> That which I am, I am; I did not seek
> For life, nor did I make myself.

There are the old cries—but they do not last. What are these theological problems in face of this piteous sight? How can he speak of them when his heart is breaking. What is the knowledge of these things to this wild emotion in which he feels that he knows himself at last?—dreary dreams: let them go. "But could I"—see how love takes the upper hand—"but could I

> With my own death redeem him from the dust—
> And why not so? let him return to-day,
> And I lie ghastly! So shall be restored
> By God the life to him He loved . . .

What is that? It is the birth of self-sacrifice.

In that the whole heart is softened. Listen to these tendernesses of the heart that follow. Will my boy bear to look on me? The recognition of Abel's character, the exquisite thought that Abel at heart will forgive, the retrospect of memory, the pity for that which might have been, and that he had himself shattered; the awful question—born of a broken heart,—What place for me?

> *Adah.* He's gone. Let us go forth.
> I hear our little Enoch cry within
> Our bower.
> *Cain.* Ah, little knows he what he weeps for!

And I who have shed blood cannot shed tears!
All the four rivers would not cleanse my soul.
Think'st thou my boy will bear to look on me?
Adah. If I thought that he would not, I would——
Cain. No,
No more of threats, we have had too many of them.
Go to our children. I will follow thee.
Oh, thou dead
And everlasting witness! whose unsinking
Blood darkens earth and heaven! what thou *now* art
I know not! but if *thou* see'st what *I* am,
I think thou wilt forgive him whom his God
Can ne'er forgive, nor his own soul.—Farewell!
O Earth, Earth!
For all the fruits thou hast rendered to me, I
Give thee back this.—Now for the wilderness.
Adah. Lead! thou shalt be my guide, and may our God
Be thine! Now let us carry forth our children.
Cain. And *he* who lieth there was childless. I
Have dried the fountain of a gentle race. . . .
O Abel!
Adah. Peace be with him!
Cain. But with *me!*

This is not a soul to which redemption is impossible.

It is the old strange problem of what is called in theology the Fall of Man, though the true problem is not that which theologians mean when they talk of the Fall. The real problem is that the knowledge of good as good is only reached by us through wrong—wrong done by ourselves, or done by others in the past; that, if we are to be saved from self, there is for many of us no way of salvation open till we have learnt our selfishness to be selfishness by some miserable exercise of it, as Cain learnt to love by slaying Abel. It is a strange world.

Sin is the cloudy porch which opens into the Temple of Good; and if we do not sin ourselves, others have

sinned for us, that we might know good as good. Yet, if we sin with that intention of finding good, if we do not contend with sin, we do not enter into good, but into deeper evil.

Some time or another, it will be explained. Meantime, it suffices me to know that unless these things were so, unless we had to reach good through the exhaustion of evil, through battle against it, there would be no such thing as humanity in the universe—and that would be indeed a pity.

Moreover, we are not left to sin and crime. Out of it arises growth, development, all the results of the battle of the soul with wrong. The very darkest crime has results which destroy the doctrine of ineradicable sin. Cain was made peaceless, but with the peacelessness he came to himself, knew himself and God, life, and eternity. Cain slew his brother, for he did not love; but when he slew him, love awoke to a higher life.

And when we come to ourselves in some great misery like this, and forget our isolation, then in the woe and wonder we find ourselves with God, and out of our heart rushes the cry, " I will arise and go to my Father."

What, then, is God's answer? Not that which the heartless theologian gives who thinks that God is such a one as himself; not " Thou art lost from all eternity —depart to endless misery "; not " Thou art doomed by another's sin to ruin—take thy ruin "; but this: " And his father saw him yet a long way off, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and said, This my son was dead, and is alive again."

And so it was with Cain! If Abel forgave, shall not God forgive?

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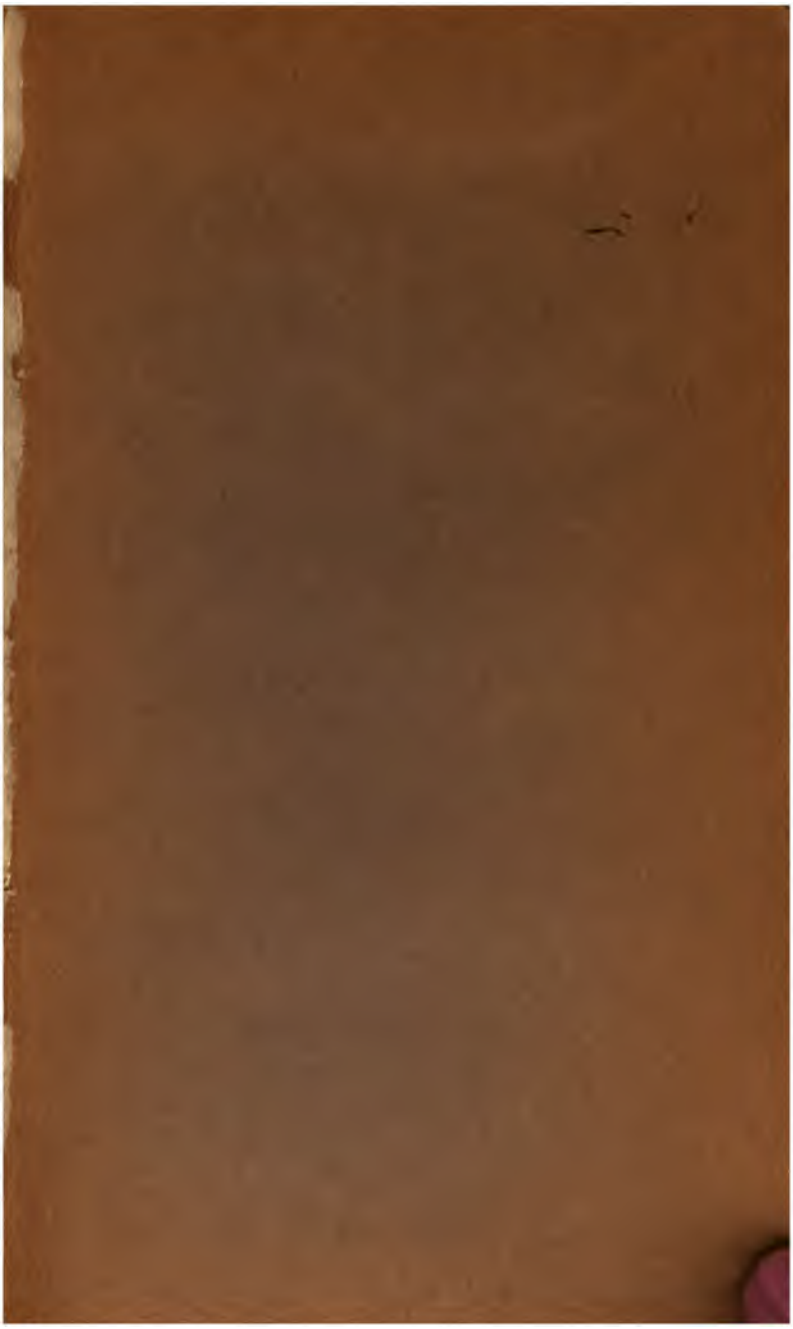

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